SEPTEMBER, 1929

Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine

WEIRD TALES

Printed in U.S.A.

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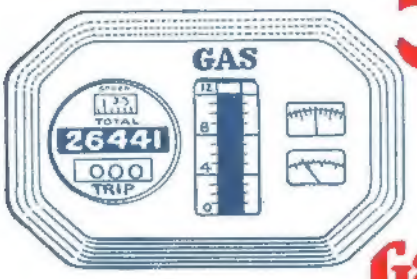
Over the Mountains from Los Angeles



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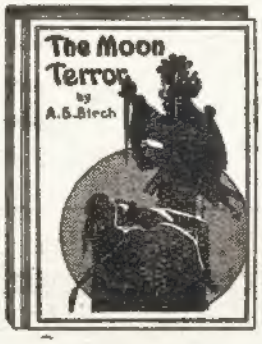
WE have received thousands of letters requesting us to reprint this story, which is too long to be republished in the magazine. THE MOON TERROR, by A. G. Birch, which appeared as a serial in WEIRD TALES in 1923, is too long to republish in our magazine consistent with our policy. As a matter of service to the multitude of readers who have requested us to reprint this story, we have had it printed in cloth-bound book form to sell at the publishers' price of $1.50 per copy. This fascinating book will be sent to you direct; we pay the postage.



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THE MOON TERROR was such a thrilling story that the entire reserve stock of the issue containing the first part was sold out on special orders to those who were not fortunate enough to start the story from the beginning, but began to read it with the second installment. It narrates the sensational attempt of a group of Chinese scientists to obtain rulership of the world by a tremendous threat against the very existence of the earth. The diabolical methods by which they put their scheme into execution, the frantic race across the ocean to circumvent them, the weird and exciting adventures that befell, make one of the most gripping and fascinating novels ever written.

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Weird Tales

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A MAGAZINE of the BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME XIV NUMBER 3

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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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WRITES Arlin C. Jones, of St. Louis: "In my opinion the July issue is one of the best you have ever put out—and I have been reading WEIRD TALES for several years. I found *Outside the Universe* a thrilling and stupendous story. I also enjoyed *Doctor Pichegru's Discovery,* particularly the place where he looked in the mirror and beheld himself. I could readily visualize his feelings at that moment, because I had an experience like that myself once, although far from being as terrible as his was. I actually believe WEIRD TALES is speeding up the work of science with its inspiring literature; at least it is real food for thought."

"I wish to commend you for the reprinting of early weird tales," writes N. J. O'Neail, of Toronto, Canada, "and urge that all of Lovecraft's and Seabury Quinn's early works may appear as soon as possible; also some of E. Hoffmann Price, Nictzin Dyalhis' *The Eternal Conflict,* and Stephen Bagby's *Whispering Tunnels.* Lovecraft of course is peerless, and Seabury Quinn a good runner-up. But de Grandin, in my opinion, was wasted on such an adventure as that of *The House of Golden Masks* in the June issue. Keep the little Frenchman in the realm of the supernatural, say I; and I think the majority of readers will agree. One of the most masterful stories of the last year was Frank Belknap Long's *The Space-Eaters,* in the July issue of 1928. Edmond Hamilton is a veritable wizard of science. I prefer his stories of present-day doom to his interplanetary yarns of the distant future. His first story in W. T.—*The Monster-God of Mamurth*—was a gem; and in my opinion some of his best since then have been *The Atomic Conquerors* and *Evolution Island.* Oh yes, and a word of praise for H. Warner Munn's *The City of Spiders,* back in August of 1926; that was one of the most thought-compelling stories you have published, as well as a gripping romance."

J. Ernest Wagner, of Centre Hall, Pennsylvania, writes to the Eyrie: "I enjoyed all the stories in the July WEIRD TALES, but why not tell us something about the writers? I always like to know something about the person whose stories I read. This could be taken care of in the Eyrie or in a special department devoted to W. T. writers. My favorite stories in the July WEIRD

(Continued on page 294)

Who Else Wants to Save Gasoline?

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M. E. Miller, Kansas City.

BUICK

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H. T. McCallon, California.

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(Continued from page 292)

TALES are: *The Wishing-Well,* by E. F. Benson; *The Guillotine Club,* by Capwell Wyckoff; and *The Corpse-Master,* by Seabury Quinn."

Writes Evelyn Martin, of Hiltonville, Indiana: "Two years ago I made a trip to St. Louis, and I never regretted that trip, for there's where I got acquainted with your wonderful magazine. By all means have Seabury Quinn's Jules de Grandin stories printed in book form. I also wish to say a word for Nictzin Dyalhis' stories. Tell Dyalhis to write more stories about Hul Jok, and have them put in book form also. Quinn's *The House of Golden Masks* and Whitehead's *Black Tancrede,* both in the June issue, were wonderful stories."

Genevieve W. Fisher, of Vineland, New Jersey, writes to the Eyrie: "What I like best in your magazine is Lovecraft's stories. He is by far your best writer; his style and his English are wonderful, as shown in his latest story, *The Dunwich Horror.* Hope we will have more like that. I don't remember whether Lovecraft wrote *The Lurking Fear* or not, but I remember that as one of your best stories published, especially in its remarkable descriptions. Please publish more stories by Lieutenant Edgar Gardiner. I vote him a fine writer."

Fred Krumboldt, of East Lansdowne, Pennsylvania, writes to the Eyrie: "The story that I like best in your latest issue is *The Last of the Mayas,* by Arthur Thatcher. This story is very realistic and weird. Let us have more like it. The stories that I like most are invasion of one planet by another, other worlds besides our own, and the finding of lost cities and countries on our earth. The second best is of course Seabury Quinn's story. Mr. Quinn is the best writer that WEIRD TALES has on its staff."

"Dear Editor," writes Avinska Leppin, of Marietta, Ohio: "I have never been guilty of missing an issue of WEIRD TALES since I absent-mindedly picked one up in a news stand about five years ago. I have every one bound for over three years back, and intend to have them all bound and put in my library. Beyond a doubt, in my estimation, Seabury Quinn's *The House of Golden Masks* is the best story in WEIRD TALES for June; in fact it's the best Seabury Quinn has ever written. The story is logical and could happen very easily in this day and age. Quinn's ability for writing a real weird tale with genuine creeps in it beats any other writer that has ever written a story for WEIRD TALES."

"Edmond Hamilton's *Outside the Universe* takes first place in your July issue, and it promises to be his best," writes Jack Darrow, of Chicago. "*The Corpse-Master,* by Seabury Quinn, comes second, and *The Last of the Mayas,* by Arthur Thatcher, is third. I hope that you will continue to give, each month, a list of the stories coming out in the following issue."

"I am twelve years old," writes Betty Irene Murray, of Akron, Ohio. "Your magazine is a literary find. I have not been reading it very long.

(Continued on page 426)

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NEXT MONTH

A superb array of gripping weird masterpieces is scheduled for the October issue of WEIRD TALES, on sale September 1.

The Woman With the Velvet Collar

By Gaston Leroux

A vivid new tale of a weird Corsican vendetta, and the guillotine, and a ghastly revenge, by the author of *"The Phantom of the Opera"*.

The Silver Countess

By Seabury Quinn

A gripping vampire tale—an eery exploit of Jules de Grandin in his warfare against age-old occult evil.

The Battle of the Toads

By David H. Keller

A weird extravaganza of eery magic, telling how Cecil, son of James, became Overlord of Cornwall.

The Scourge of Eygpt

By Arlton Eadie

A strange tale of a mummy, a scarab, and Kephra-Ophis, slave-driver for that Pharaoh who oppressed the Israelites.

The Witch-Ball

By E. F. Benson

A strange tale of clairvoyance and occult mysteries, and the finding of a murdered woman's body—a story by a well-known British writer of weird fiction.

Skull-Face

By Robert E. Howard

An astounding and fascinating story of a mummy that came up out of the sea to rule the world—a story replete with vivid thrills and stark horror.

These are some of the super-excellent stories that will appear in the October issue of WEIRD TALES

October Issue on Sale September 1

The WHITE WIZARD

by Sophie Wenzel Ellis

"He removed the cap and placed it upon Phil's head."

"OVER there, across the river, where you see that tower shooting up high above the trees, lives a man of mystery," said Phil West, a slim, dark, khaki-clad young man. "The natives call him the White Wizard."

Tom Bannon, rotund and heavy-faced and as youthful as his companion, reined in his horse and looked across the San Juan river toward a break in a typical Brazilian jungle scene.

"Who is he—a white man?" he asked.

"Yes, a Spaniard—Don Julian Mendoza." Phil West's fine, dark eyes snapped with interest. "He's a scientist from Madrid, who settled in this wild section of Brazil years ago, some say to conduct a secret experiment. I was told that the half-breeds won't come within ten miles of his house, because they fear he will seize them and turn them into monkeys."

Tom Bannon's explosive laugh made his big body shake. "You and your South American myths touch my funny-bone! I've knocked about with you among the Inca ruins and the Amazon jungle for six months, and not yet have you shown me a genuine mystery."

A sheepish grin spread over Phil's dark, good-looking face.

"I'll admit that the haunted shrine at Castillo was a fake; and that the River of Blood was colored with the juice from those weird red water flowers; but the White Wizard is really a man of mystery, Tom, or there would not be so much talk about him."

Tom glanced hurriedly at the banking clouds in the sky.

"There's a storm due soon," he

said, in the deep voice that matched his huge frame. "It will give us an excuse to get acquainted with your White Wizard, for even he would not be heartless enough to turn us out to the mercies of a tropical storm."

"Then let's swim the horses across before it is too late."

Already the wind was lashing the narrow river into dirty cream waves. Hidden creatures scurried through the tangled denseness of the jungle. Birds screamed their warnings in the smothered trees overhead.

The two young men urged their horses into the turbulent water, and in a few minutes were inching their way over the woven underbrush on the other side. They found a dim path which ribboned through the dense growth. It led them up a steep hill to an amazingly large house on the crest, built in the rococo splendor of old Spain; a rambling, thick-walled structure that thrust insolent shoulders to the very edge of the black *selva* which swallowed it on every side.

A puzzled look crossed Tom's plump face. "Appears interesting, all right. Suppose he'll turn us into monkeys if we ask for shelter until the storm lets up?"

"I hope he does," grinned Phil.

They dismounted at the foot of a long flight of stairs which leaped up the hill to the tall gate. Before they had finished tying their horses, a small stone whizzed through the air and struck Phil smartly on the arm.

"Look out! Here comes another!" shouted Tom.

Phil ducked his head just as a larger stone cut the air close by him.

"Someone under the steps did that," declared Tom. "It was a negro; I saw his black hand."

A peal of coarse laughter came from the direction of the steps—laughter that had a disturbing abandon in it. The two men eyed each other indignantly. Phil whipped out his automatic and stooped to peer through an opening left by the stones which had fallen away at the side.

"What in thunder!" he bawled, and stepped closer to the opening. "Come here, Tom!"

Tom hastened to look over his friend's shoulder, and in the half-lighted recess under the steps he saw a dark, bulky shape. His first thought was that it was a hideously deformed negro; but he soon perceived the hair that covered the body, and the powerful arms that reached almost to the long-fingered feet. The creature was a huge anthropoid ape.

"Tom, did you hear it?" vociferated Phil. "It spoke to me when I first looked at it!"

"Spoke to you?" Tom eyed him oddly.

"I'm not kidding you; it said just as plainly as I'm speaking to you now, 'Good morning, master.'"

"Phil, you're crazy!" Tom announced amiably. "Those wild tales about Mendoza have gone to your brain."

Phil flushed. "You'll find out before long whether or not I'm crazy, or merely more discerning than you," he retorted.

Tom laughed good-naturedly at his choleric friend, and followed him up the steps. The gate wheezed open on rusty, unused hinges. A hound bayed dismally.

About five acres of the hilltop was inclosed in a high, wrought-iron fence, through which the dauntless jungle had sprawled into the shrubs and neglected lawns.

Their knocking at the great, oaken door rolled through spacious halls within.

2

THE door opened, and a tall, pale-faced man confronted them. He regarded them intently with eyes that were large and dark and strangely impressive, like the brooding eyes of an old master's painting.

"You wish shelter from the storm, *señores?*" he addressed them in excellent English, flavored with a slight accent.

Phil laughed a little nervously. "You are a good guesser, sir," he declared boyishly. "We can pay well for supper and lodging for the night."

"I charge nothing for my hospitality, *señor.*" He fingered his black, military beard. "I welcome you as guests, not as lodgers."

"But we hate to intrude," demurred Tom.

"Julian Mendoza deems it an honor to entertain you."

Phil's brown, sinewy hand went out impulsively toward the pale, aristocratic hand which was offered.

"You are most generous," he said warmly. "West is my name. My friend here is Mr. Bannon. We are both from New York, and have been knocking about South America for the past six months, studying the Inca ruins, mostly."

"I'm something of an archeologist myself," returned Mendoza. "Our tastes are similar, and we shall pass a charming evening, I am sure."

Through the tiled hall he ushered them into a large room, magnificently furnished. The walls and ceilings were richly frescoed. Ornate hanging lamps shed warm, colored light over the hand-carved furniture. Beyond the stained glass windows the lightning could be seen tearing across the sky in fiery streaks.

"It is a pleasure to me to have guests," said Mendoza. "I so seldom see anyone besides my one servant and my niece."

As he spoke, the curtains hanging before a door parted and a girl entered. For a moment she stood there, with one arm holding back the rich folds of the tapestry, and the other fingering the lace of her white dress. Her soft, light hair, worn somewhat longer than the fashionable bob, flowed in shining waves and ringlets about her exquisitely molded neck. A band of pale blue velvet marked the fine lines of her head and made her large brown eyes very dark. She was not more than five feet tall, and her form, though rounded in womanly proportions, was slight and frail. When she saw the two young men, a vivid blush spread over her soft cheeks and throat, and she turned to flee.

"Wait, Inez," called Mendoza. "I want to present my young friends to you."

She acknowledged the introduction with a graceful bow and a shy, dimpled smile. After passing a few commonplace remarks, she excused herself on the plea that she wished to see that dinner was properly served. As she left the room, Mendoza's eyes followed her with a proud look, and a paternal smile softened his thin lips.

"Ah, my little Inez!" he murmured. "She is the core of my heart."

"Does Miss Mendoza live here alone with you, Don Julian?" asked Phil.

"Since finishing school in your United States two years ago. Her mother was a New Yorker. Her father died when she was a baby. It is rather lonely here for her, as she sees no one for months at a time. We can not even keep servants, except my faithful old Ramon. But I can not part with her; she is the one comfort of my life. I am her only living relative, and she has no alternative but to live with me."

"Selfish brute!" Phil ground under his teeth.

"Would you care to freshen yourselves before dining, *señores?*" continued Mendoza.

The young men replied in the affirmative, and Mendoza rang a bell which summoned an ancient half-breed man servant.

"Show the gentlemen into the west bedroom, Ramon," said Mendoza.

The room was luxuriously furnished, with silk-draped walls and a huge, hand-carved ebony bed. In a few minutes they had rid themselves

of the grime that covered them and changed to the extra khaki suits which they had with them.

That dinner was one which Tom and Phil never forgot. Warmed with wine, Mendoza's wit sparkled, and his fascinating personality wove a pleasant spell about them. He had a head and face of unusual beauty. His black hair and pointed beard, slightly touched with gray, contrasted pleasingly with his pale skin and finely marked features. His soft, aristocratic voice and elegant manner were not merely the result of culture; they were his heritage from a long ancestral line of Spanish grandees.

When they had finished dining, they retired to Mendoza's study. Soon Inez and Phil withdrew to a sofa before the huge fireplace, while Tom and Mendoza warmed over scientific discussions.

Above the noise of the rain came a timid tapping at the casement. It slid open and in the aperture appeared a huge, hairy form. It was the ape. His little, beady eyes snapped quickly from Phil's face to Tom's. Then he threw back his grotesque head and laughed uproariously. A frown crossed Mendoza's face, and he went to the window and spoke in a low voice to the animal, which turned reluctantly and disappeared from view.

"That brute seems to have almost human intelligence," remarked Tom.

"You have heard of my experiments?" asked Mendoza. A faint smile played upon his lips. "In that ape you are observing the result of the natural process of evolution, assisted, of course, by science. For instance, it possesses the power of speech. I have only forced nature's own issue. She is tardy in her creation, you must confess; and there is a lapse of countless ages between the dumb anthropoid and this!" He touched himself on the breast significantly.

Phil, his dark face eager with interest, left his seat by the fire and joined the men.

"Tell me," he asked, "how have you brought about this miracle?"

Mendoza laughed. "What miracle, *señor?* Is there anything miraculous in transplanting a wild flower into a well-ordered hothouse, carefully nourishing and grafting it, until it is transformed into a fragrant, perfect bloom? You do not think that wonderful. Yet an animal is but a wild, uncultivated thing. When nature is his only trainer, he develops as slowly and imperfectly as the wild flower. Bring man's genius to work, however, and in a few years, yes, in a few months, you have accomplished more than nature has in her countless ages."

Tom winked slyly at Phil, as though he thought Mendoza was exaggerating.

"Uncle Julian," broke in Inez, "do stop that wise conversation, which no stranger believes, and play for us."

Mendoza's pale face flushed with enthusiasm as he picked up a violin of rare workmanship. He polished the beautiful wood with an affectionate touch; then he placed the instrument in position.

A wild, sobbing note, clear and cold and passionless, trembled from the strings. This was followed by a quick succession of staccato trills that froze the blood of his listeners. Then from under the bow there flowed a rush of music such as they had never before heard—the boom and roar of mighty cataracts, swishing, whirling, rushing; the shrieking of tornadoes on wild, desolate shores; the weird moans and cries of anguished souls; and through it all a sad, wailing minor strain that summoned involuntary tears to the eyes of the listeners.

At last the music melted into a melancholy revery. Tears rolled unheeded from Mendoza's eyes and fell upon the strings of his violin. The tender strain suddenly broke off, and he finished with a grand finale of

ghoulish shrieks which left his audience trembling and breathless. The violin slipped from his hands and his bearded chin sank upon his breast.

A heavy silence hung upon the room for many seconds.

Phil whispered hoarsely: "Don Julian, you could stir the world with playing like that!"

Mendoza raised his tear-stained face. "I had a great master," he said. "Longinotti."

"Longinotti?" said Phil, puzzled. "Not Fabio Longinotti, the famous Italian composer?"

"The same."

"But Fabio Longinotti died thirty-five years ago. You do not look older than forty."

"I am forty-one, to be exact." He turned to Inez, wearily. "Come, my dear; we will retire." With an air of apology, he added: "You gentlemen will please excuse me. Music has a powerful influence on me."

He drew Inez's arm affectionately through his and led her from the room. She paused for a moment in the doorway to bid the young men good-night, and Phil flushed with pleasure when she lifted her slender fingers to her lips and blew him a kiss.

When the echo of their receding footsteps had died away, Tom's plump face broke into a broad grin.

"Old fellow, you've made a hit!" he said. "I've a mind to punch your head off."

Phil ran his fingers nervously through his black, wavy hair. "Tom," he said earnestly, "I'm going to marry that girl."

Tom's face went suddenly grave. "Gosh, I believe you mean it! Better go easy, boy. Don Julian told me that he will never permit her to marry. Notice how he trotted her off to bed when he left? Didn't want her alone with any eligibles. And Don Julian Mendoza is a man that I'd hate to get down on me!"

3

It was past midnight when they were awakened by the dismal howling of the hound. There was a blood-curdling quality to the animal's weird wail which made them exceedingly uncomfortable. After enduring it for more than ten minutes, Phil said:

"There is some cause for that animal to howl that way. Maybe there's a snake or something after him. Let's dress and investigate. My nerves can't stand this racket another minute."

"He's only moon-struck," said Tom.

"Well, dress, anyway, and let's quiet him. Better take your automatic."

They drew on their clothes and went out through a door in their room which opened on a terrace. The night was beautifully clear, with the freshness that follows a storm, and there was a full moon.

At the back of the house they discovered what once had been a garden, but now the jungle had crept into it, choked out the plants, and wound crushing, destroying tendrils around the sun-dials and sculptures. Here, isolated from all other buildings, was the tower they had first seen. From the tangle of the jungle it vaulted high into the moon-bathed sky. Three stories up there was a lighted window, uncurtained. At the window sat Mendoza. And under the window was the wailing dog, crouching, his eyes spread in terror toward the figure above.

Mendoza was working. His head was covered with a metal cap, connected by wires with something beyond the range of vision from without. His hands were busy in front of him. Even from where they were standing, the young men could see the expression of concentrated thought upon his face.

But as they watched, that pale,

studious face underwent an extraordinary change; rage convulsed it, drawing back the thin lips from the teeth, stretching the eyes in a mad glare. He jerked the metal cap from his head and stood with clenched hands, trembling, his head thrown back. For a moment he stood thus, glaring down at the howling dog; then he snatched something that lay close at hand and disappeared from the window. His steps could be heard pounding down the stairs. Soon he dashed out of the tower with a whip. When the frightened dog saw his master rushing toward him, he cringed close to the ground and whined.

Mendoza, cursing in voluble Spanish, raised the lash in his white-knuckled hands and brought it down through the air, with a sickening swish, upon the animal's quivering flanks. Again and again the cruel whip cut bloody gashes in the poor beast's side, and yet the dog made no motion to move. Then Mendoza, screaming like a jungle animal, threw the whip far into the bushes and leaped upon the hound. One slender hand reached into the open mouth and drew out the lolling tongue. The other, wielding a pocket-knife, approached the tongue with unspeakable intent.

Phil leaped forward from where he stood in the shadows and cried: "Enough, Don Julian!"

Instantly Mendoza arose from his seat on the moaning dog's body. As a cat walks, he came forward until only three feet separated him and Phil. The moon made points of light in his huge black eyes—light that drew Phil's gaze and held it. For many seconds they stood thus, with eyes on each other. At last, when Mendoza laughed and looked away, Phil felt the blood tingle through his body as though he had stepped from a freezing atmosphere into the warm sunlight.

"Fool!" muttered Mendoza. "You play with the devil!" He laughed again, unpleasantly, and went toward his tower.

When his back was turned, the half-dead hound got up weakly and staggered off into the bushes.

"What is he, god or demon?" mumbled Phil.

In silence they made their way to their room. For many minutes they lay awake, without speaking.

"Tom," said Phil, "I'm sure that Don Julian has some sort of hypnotic power. Did you not notice that the hound remained motionless while he was whipping him? And I'll swear, Tom, that he had me all but petrified when I interfered."

4

PHIL was awake first the next morning. Through the open window he caught the flutter of a white dress. In a moment he was up and reaching for his clothes.

He found Inez sitting on a large rock, at the edge of the ruined garden. Sprawled at her feet was the ape, with his bright little eyes fixed upon her face. There was mute adoration in the animal's gaze—the protective adoration that is given only to a kind master.

Phil shouted a happy greeting, and the ape leaped to his feet with a surly growl.

Inez laughed joyously. "Dear old Pete! He is so afraid that someone will harm me." She patted the animal's hairy hand. "Were it not for him, I wouldn't dare leave the house, for there are snakes and other awful things about." She shuddered.

"He is your faithful watch-dog, isn't he?" said Phil.

"Oh, no! Don't class Pete with a dog. He is the dearest, most faithful, most intelligent—slave. If you only knew——" She bit her lips suddenly as though she were about to say too much.

Phil sat beside her, and Pete, with a reproachful backward glance, went slowly toward the house.

"You find it rather lonely here, don't you?" asked Phil.

"Very. I was educated at your Vassar. Now I never see young people."

A wave of tenderness came over him as he watched the childish little figure beside him. She was so unlike the sophisticated girls with whom he was accustomed to associate. He noticed the slender little hand lying listlessly in her lap; each tiny finger was like a delicate flower, and dimples showed even in her clenched fist.

For more than an hour he sat beside her, enjoying her bright retorts to his sallies. Then a large stone rolled down the steep incline and splashed into the stream. Mendoza was approaching. The Spaniard fixed his dead black eyes upon Phil's face, and the young man colored with uneasiness.

Mendoza took his niece's arm. "Did you not hear the breakfast bell?" he demanded.

"No, Uncle Julian," she replied in her soft voice. "Is it really breakfast time?"

"Time does fly when you are in conversation with a charming young man, doesn't it?" he scolded.

She drew away from him with blazing face and quivering lips. Then she left them and darted swiftly over the loose stones to the house. Mendoza seemed to have forgotten the young man's presence, for he walked beside him with his head bent in meditation.

When they reached the breakfast room, Phil was startled to see Pete's huge, hairy form huddled in an armchair, poring over a book that rested on his knee. Phil had often seen monkeys on the vaudeville stage appear to read newspapers; but there was a weird earnestness about the way the manlike creature followed the lines with an awkward forefinger, and moved his coarse lips as though he were mumbling the words to himself, child-fashion.

Phil passed behind the ape's chair and glanced over his shoulder. The book in which the animal appeared to be so deeply engrossed was a first-grade English reader. The ape's awkward finger had stopped on one word as a child might do when the spelling or the meaning puzzled him.

"Pete is having trouble with his lesson this morning," said Mendoza. "What is it, Pete? Can I help you?"

He leaned over the ape's shoulder, and Pete lifted the book, with his finger still indicating one of the words.

"That is 'gnaw', Pete," explained Mendoza. "It means to bite with your teeth as mice do."

Pete uttered a grunt of satisfaction, and his finger passed on slowly along the lines. Phil nervously mopped his brow with his handkerchief. The unnatural situation did not seem ludicrous.

"Can that animal actually read?" he ventured to ask.

"Very well. He reads better than he can speak. You see, the vocal organs of the ape are not formed for fluent speech. But Pete does excellently; get him aroused, and he'll talk as well as a three-year-old child."

"And you have hopes of developing this ape to a still higher plane of intelligence?"

"I not only have hopes; I absolutely am convinced that Pete can be educated to a point where he will at least equal the lower state of savage man. I have been working on him for only five years. Pete is now grown—sixteen years old. Had I begun to educate him when he was much younger, his brain would have developed faster. Pete lives like a man now; he has his own little shack, which he keeps fairly clean."

Here Ramon entered with a huge tray loaded with a steaming pot of chocolate, delicately fried wild fowl, and a picturesque dish of tropical

fruits. Pete closed his book and stole quietly from the room.

"After our *siesta* today," said Mendoza, "I have a rare experience in store for you gentlemen—an extraordinary adventure. I have decided to reveal to the world who I am, and what I have accomplished. For the first time, I will exhibit my most closely guarded creation, which even Inez has never seen." He leaned back in his chair and paused dramatically. "I will show you, gentlemen, my secret garden, where you may view the wonders of a dozen *Arabian Nights* tales!"

Tom and Phil exchanged surreptitious glances.

"You are too generous," protested Tom. "We'd like to see your garden, of course; but we can't take advantage of your hospitality. We'd better be on our way this morning."

"But you must give me the pleasure of at least a few days of your society, unless I bore you!" Mendoza smiled with rare charm. "Visitors are a luxury to us. Have pity on us, *señores!* I have set my heart on your remaining."

He passed his long, slender fingers through his heavy hair, and his beautiful eyes glowed with even more than their usual brilliancy.

His smooth voice went on pleadingly. " 'Twill be such a great happiness for me to disclose the fruits of my labors to you."

"If you put it that way," said Tom, "I guess we've got to accept."

5

WHILE the others were taking their *siesta* after luncheon, Phil wandered restlessly about. How could he sleep, with his thoughts constantly on a small, sweet face brushed with soft, flying, golden hair!

His undirected footsteps led him to the tangled garden and beyond to the vine-smothered fence in the rear. Here, under a tall tree, he saw a small shack built from twisted twigs and vines. Through the hole that was the door he saw rude furniture—a bed padded with leaves, a chair made from a log, and an old table. He paused for a moment. The rough walls were almost covered with bright pieces of cloth, paper, gold and silver tinsel, leaves crisped and glowing with autumn tints, and many other brilliant odds and ends that made a sort of savage tapestry from floor to ceiling.

Phil smiled at this fantastic attempt at decoration, for he remembered that Mendoza had told him Pete had his own little shack. These colored bits, carefully pinned in place, spoke pathetically of long, lonely hours whiled away by a forlorn creature that was neither jungle beast nor man, but a curious combination of both. Phil hesitated before entering. To him Pete had suddenly acquired a certain grotesque dignity.

A notebook lying upon the table caught his seeking eyes. He crossed the room and picked it up. The pages, thumbed and soiled, were scrawled over in large, limping letters which resembled a child's early attempt at penmanship. A cold shiver passed over Phil. Could the great, awkward fingers of an ape really have formed those uncouth pot-hooks? Mendoza had told him that the ape could write, but this was beyond belief. He laughed weakly at his own wild doubts. The letters must have been made by some little child. Perhaps the notebook had been Inez's.

At last Phil turned to the page where the faltering attempts had been successful in a word that pridefully occupied the entire space:

INEZ

This convinced him that the book belonged to Inez, for a child's first written word usually is its own name. He breathed with relief after he had made this decision, for there was something appalling about an animal possessing intelligence which was so amazingly human.

But on the very next page he was again disturbed with doubt. In a smear of discolored blood that had, perhaps, come from a cut finger, there was the imprint of a great, rude thumb. Sticking to this dried blood that had clotted thickly were several coarse, brown hairs. Even this did not entirely convince Phil that the notebook belonged to the ape, for it is a mischievous habit of his kind to steal and hide the belongings of the master. But as the young man continued to turn the pages, he perceived that the writer was now trying to connect the word Inez into a combination of words; and on the very last page, in a fairly legible manner, a sentence struck Phil's eyes like a blow:

PETE LUVS INEZ

A sudden fear clutched at the young man's heart. The adoration that Pete gave to Inez was not merely the affection of beast for mistress; for Pete was no longer a beast.

"It can't be!" shuddered the young man. "It can't be true that Mendoza has raised this brute to where he has the impulses of a man!"

If Pete was cultured enough to write Inez's name, why should he not be capable of loving her as a man might who had passed beyond savagery and reached the dawn of civilization? Revolting as the thought was to Phil, he knew that there could be dangerous reality in it. He felt a sudden sympathetic regard for Pete. As he once more turned the pages of the notebook, he realized that, although the genius of Mendoza had destroyed the barrier that separates the brute from the man, it was Inez who was raising this strange creature to a realization of human hopes and desires.

Phil was so occupied with the notebook that he did not hear a soft footfall in the room. The first knowledge that he had of another's presence was a short, shrill scream of rage that came from behind his shoulder. Then a dull, heavy blow upon the head brought a red mist before his eyes. With a tired sigh, he crumpled in a heap to the floor.

6

His return to consciousness was gradual and delightful. A gentle, perfumed wind fanned his face, and far-away music sounded in his ears. He stretched himself luxuriously upon a couch that was as soft as silk down. For several minutes he lay with closed eyes, breathing deeply of the scented wind that bathed his lungs with intoxicating balm. Something soft and warm touched his brow.

"He's coming to, Uncle," spoke a low voice.

He opened his eyes wide and stared about him, half dazed. He was in a garden of strange, dream-like beauty. Gathered about him were Tom, Inez and Mendoza.

Inez flushed suddenly and laid her little hand upon his. "There, sir! How do you feel?"

"Immensely happy!" He grinned up at her. "What happened?"

Tom leaned over him, anxiously. "Pete cracked you on the head. It was lucky for you that I was right behind him, or he would have finished you in short order."

Bewildered, Phil felt his head carefully with his fingers. He had no sensation of pain or even discomfort.

"I remember. Something struck my head with terrific force. I guess I went to sleep after that. But why am I here?"

"For repairs, young man," put in Mendoza. "Had we not brought you here, you might never have awakened from your sudden sleep. Your skull was cracked."

Again Phil passed doubtful fingers over his head, which was unbound and apparently uninjured. "If my skull was cracked, it mended miraculously. I have no pain whatever."

To demonstrate, he sat up, and

after a moment of hesitation, stood upon his feet and walked about. His nostrils quivered with pleasure as he drew in a great draft of the intoxicating atmosphere, and with every breath he felt that his physical being was becoming more vital, his mentality clearer.

"Who could feel pain here?" said Mendoza. "This is the Garden of Life. The blind, the crippled, the sick, those who suffer in body or mind, can become whole in this atmosphere. The blow that Pete gave you cracked your skull. Had this occurred anywhere else in the world, and had a physician sought to heal you, a cure would have been dragged over weeks of suffering. But age can not wither, nor accident destroy, that which breathes this atmosphere. It was the atmosphere, sir, and my ten fingers, that mended your fractured skull in one hour."

Phil looked questioningly at Tom. His friend's face was grave, yet his eyes snapped with excitement.

"You were in a bad fix when Pete finished with you, old man," said Tom quietly. "There was a little puddle of blood under your head. See how you splashed your shirt."

Phil saw that his khaki shirt was stained with freshly dried blood.

"When we reached this garden, I thought you were a goner," Tom went on. "But that was an hour ago. Anything could happen here in an hour—with Don Julian's magic all about you. I've seen the White Wizard in action, Phil."

Phil looked about him, half skeptically. Before his eyes stretched a garden of strange, perfect beauty. Thousands of blossoms of fantastic form and color swung in the scented breeze—great, flamboyant blooms on vine, bush and tree. Fountains jetted from flowery mounds, their crystalline spray catching the wild riot of color that glowed on every hand. Bridges and winding paths beckoned the feet and promised magic beyond the enticing curves. But not alone was the eye enchanted and the olfactory nerves delicately gratified; the vivifying quality in the air soothed yet intensified the senses. A feeling of joyousness settled upon Phil. Youth and life sang through his blood like heady wine.

"What is it, Don Julian?" he whispered breathlessly. "What is the strange quality in the atmosphere?"

A low laugh broke from Mendoza. "You are not in nature's world now; you are in *mine*. Do you see those butterflies flitting around the flowers by that fountain? They are ten years old. The ordinary span of a butterfly's life is but two days in the outer world; in mine it is illimitable. This is the Garden of Eden, sir, created by me. And here there is no forbidden fruit—no serpent." His thin lips parted over his perfect teeth.

Phil looked at Inez, and his head swam as he met her dark eyes. The long lashes drooped until they swept her cheeks. Forgetful of Mendoza and Tom, they wandered off, hand in hand, along the perfumed paths.

As in a dream, they strolled about, silent, overwhelmed by the beauty that surrounded them and the intoxication in their blood. Birds of brilliant plumage warbled in the blossom-laden trees, fairly reeling in the ecstatic joy of existence. Each moment the pair's enchanted eyes were delighted with some strange and beautiful bloom that exhaled voluptuous fragrance. By this time, the atmosphere had woven a spell of sorcery about them. Now and again their eyes met, lingered, and melted with the intoxication of the glance.

At last Inez spoke. "Are we dreaming, Phil? It is strange that I never discovered this garden. See, there is the house plainly visible. Beyond it is the jungle, dipping to the river."

When Phil heard her speak his given name, for the first time, he turned eagerly to her, jerking his head around suddenly. As he did so, his brow struck a hard obstruction, and

he fell back, half stunned by the blow. Nearly blind with pain, he looked about him, puzzled. There was neither wall nor rock nor sculpture near, yet the blow had had no impetus behind it—the thing which had struck him was stationary. Again he took a step forward, and again stumbled back with a bruised brow.

"Oh, what is it?" cried Inez, gazing in horror at a thin stream of blood which trickled down his forehead.

Phil threw his hands before him. Two feet from his face they came in contact with a hard, rough surface. He stared at Inez, blankly. Her face had gone dead white.

"Am I insane?" he asked. "Or is there an unseen barrier in front of us? Feel before you, Inez—carefully."

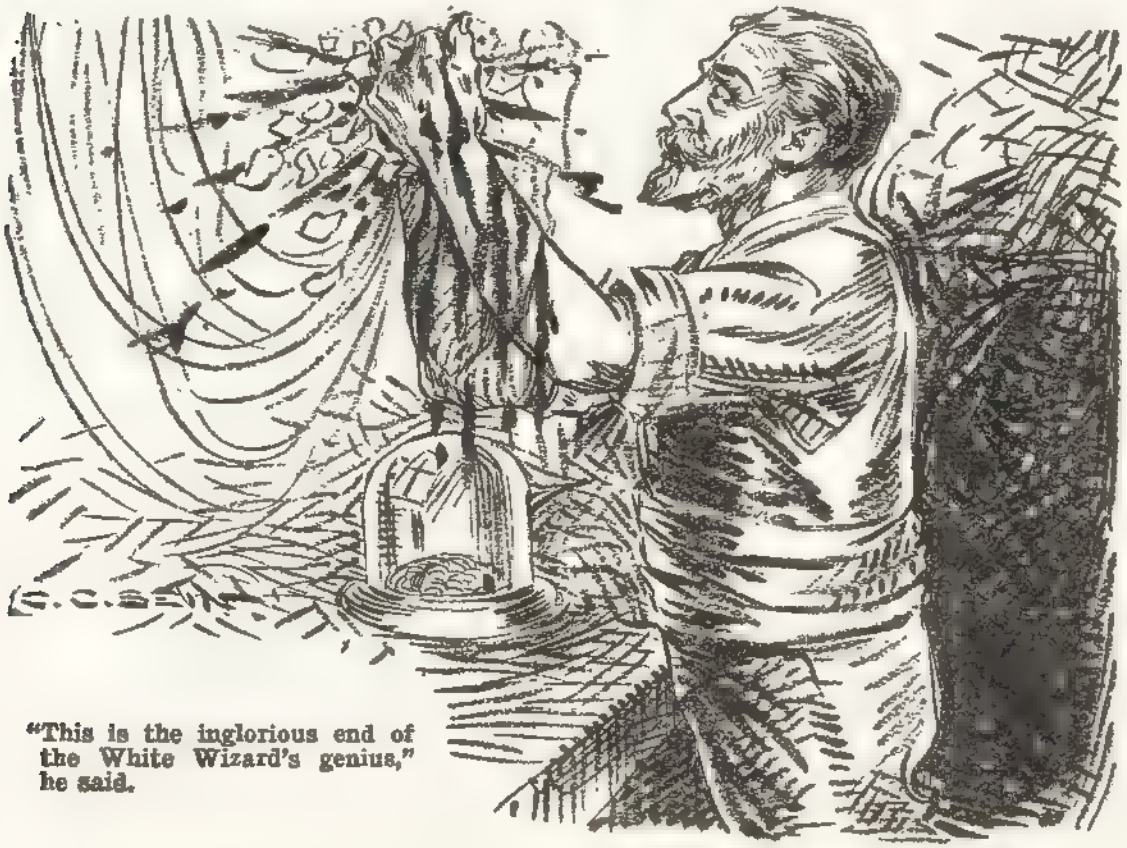
She put out her small hand and touched something—something invisible in the air!

7

INEZ's lips trembled as she stifled a sob of fright.

"Take me away!" she pleaded, crowding against Phil's arm.

Suddenly, as though the light of the sun were eclipsed, an impenetrable darkness fell upon the garden; then, as suddenly as it had come, the darkness vanished, and a brilliant golden light streamed around. They stared about them, bewildered. The garden, in all its marvelous beauty, lay bathed in the golden light, but the outer world had disappeared. Gone was the house, the snarled jungle beyond the garden; gone as completely as a melted snowflake. Opaque walls of rock encompassed them and shut off the blue sky and the landscape. Mendoza came forward and stood before them with a cynical smile upon his fine lips.



"This is the inglorious end of the White Wizard's genius," he said.

"Uncle! What is it?" moaned Inez.

With a laugh, Mendoza threw back his head. A gentle wind blew the long, soft hair from his broad temples, and the strange light that filled the garden brought out all the delicate, intellectual lines of his face.

"Consider me Aladdin," he said, "and this my magic lamp."

He buried his hand in a thick clump of shrubbery. Instantly the stone walls disappeared, and the river, with its surrounding scenery, and the great bulk of the house came into view. Tom lifted his round, ashen face to Mendoza and gulped hard.

"Ah, you are curious," teased the Spaniard. "You would even fear, if you were not in my world, where fear and distress are aliens. But I will satisfy the agonies of your suspense, and you will laugh at the simplicity of it all."

He paused, as a cat plays with its prey; then continued in his sonorous voice:

"I have discovered a new light ray which renders the opaque absolutely invisible."

"But——" protested Phil.

Mendoza stayed his speech with an impatient wave of the hand. "Hear me out! This garden is built in the bowels of the hill. It is entirely cut off from the outer world by a surrounding wall of rock. The only outlet is the hidden trap-door in the tower, through which Inez and Mr. Bannon will recollect that we passed. The atmosphere and the light I have myself created; no matter how. By concentrating my nil-ray, as I call it, upon the walls, they are rendered as transparent as thin glass. In fact, any solid body can be made invisible when exposed to this ray."

Again it seemed to the fevered fancies of his beholders that the light gathered around him, and that his eyes—his dark, magnetic eyes—were the center of everything.

"The invisible man is no longer a fable," he went on. "Think what it will mean to me—or to anyone who possesses my secret—to be able to move among my fellow men and not be seen. Permit me to illustrate."

He took a few steps to one side and suddenly vanished from view. After a moment of surprize, Phil laughed lightly.

"I've seen disappearing stunts pulled off in a ten-cent side-show," he chuckled.

A smart blow on the mouth checked him. Anger flared up in his eyes, and he whirled on his heel with clinched fists. There was no one near him. Close to his ear sounded Mendoza's characteristic laugh, and the echoes of that mocking laugh tinkled musically through the garden and blended with the dripping of the fountains and the stirring of the leaves. Even the birds and the insects sounded as though they caught up the ringing cadences, for a sudden flurry and twittering came from every hand.

As unexpectedly as he had vanished, Mendoza appeared before them, gradually. First a hand, disembodied; then an arm, and then his entire body materialized slowly and weirdly from the air. A smile of amusement was on his thin lips. He stood with folded arms crossed over his violin.

Without speaking, he raised the violin to his chin and drew the bow across the strings. Ripples of low, magnetic sounds soared from the instrument. Every shrub and tree in the garden stirred, and a multifarious flock of birds flew into the air. They settled about Mendoza, some on his very body, others on the brink of the fountain by which he was standing, and others in the surrounding shrubbery. For a few moments there was a medley of fussing and scolding. Soon, hushed by the magic sounds of the music, they squatted quietly, with cocked, listening heads.

The low sobs of the violin, the strange beauty of the garden, the exhilarating atmosphere, and the sweet,

exalted expression on Inez's face charged Phil's blood with madness. Almost involuntarily, he sought the tiny hand of the girl and drew her close to him. His arm went around her unresisting body, and, oblivious of the others, he pressed her close.

A harsh, twanging crash sent them trembling apart. Mendoza stood before them, eyes ablaze. His clenched hand held the violin, with the broken strings dangling from it. His thin lips quivered with his panting breath. Shrieking a terrible Spanish oath, he raised the violin on high, as though to strike the young man with it.

The magnetism of his eyes held Phil paralyzed. He tried to move, but stood as motionless as a slab of marble. He tried to speak, but no sound issued from his livid lips. His blood oozed in icy streams through his body, and his mind refused to work. After what seemed many minutes to the young man, Mendoza lowered the violin. His distorted features regained their usual calm expression, and he held out his hand impulsively.

"It is the music, *señor*. It affects me so strangely. Forgive me!" His voice was pleading, almost humble.

Phil took the hand that he offered. "The half-breeds call you the White Wizard, Don Julian—and with good reason. You are a genius—a dozen geniuses rolled into one! You are a musician, a naturalist who understands biology as probably no one has ever done before. You are a scientist, a psychologist. Heavens, man! What else are you? Why don't you leave this God-forsaken spot and benefit humanity with your genius?"

A look of pain swept Mendoza's handsome face. For a moment he stood silent and pale, staring with unseeing eyes at the splendid flowers and trees that had bloomed into unearthly perfection under his hands. Then he laughed a harsh, bitter laugh.

"The world can do without me very well," he muttered.

He turned from them and walked slowly down one of the winding paths. Phil followed him and touched him lightly upon the back.

"And Pete—what have you done to Pete?" he demanded. "He is an animal with a man's brain and heart. I believe you have even given him a soul."

A smile slashed the White Wizard's lips.

"Pete is the crown of my endeavors," he said proudly. "Pete is what has made me master of beast as well as of man."

"Pete is the loneliest creature in the world," broke in Phil. "He is neither man nor beast. His instincts crave the jungles, but his high mentality craves companionship with men. I think, Don Julian, that Pete is a very dangerous combination."

"We are all dangerous combinations, my friend. The most highly civilized man has something of the jungle beast in his heart. Remember, not so long ago, we, too, lived in the jungle."

"But Pete is no longer in the jungle. You have taken him from his native haunts and given him the hopes and desires of a man. He has risen above the instincts of the ape. He reaches out, blindly, perhaps, for the same things that a man wants."

Mendoza's face flushed, and he threw out his arms in an impulsive gesture.

"And why should Pete not have a man's hopes and aspirations? As he develops, it is natural for him to have desires which he never experienced before. In a few years, I trust, Pete will be a useful citizen."

Disgust went over Phil. "Do you know that Pete has begun to love Miss Mendoza?"

"You discovered his diary?" Mendoza's smile was amused. "That is why he tried to kill you. Yes, I know that he worships Inez. It is what I wish. Love between the sexes—the love that is beyond mere desire—exists only where culture has drowned

brute instinct. Even the races of men that have not reached the more advanced stages of culture know scarcely anything of love. Loving Inez will raise Pete to a higher plane of mentality."

Phil met his eyes, so strangely brilliant and black, lit by a light that threw its influence over him like a cloak.

"Good heavens!" he shuddered. "I believe you would do anything for the sake of science. You would even put the happiness of your niece at stake."

"Anything for the sake of knowledge," declared the other. "Knowledge is what raises man from the beast, and superman from the human. The more knowledge one has, the more he can accomplish. Why has the world progressed so marvelously during the past fifty years? It is because we have had all the knowledge of our forefathers to help us obtain new knowledge. If life were longer, if we were not cut down just when our minds have become filled with enough learning to accomplish something worthy, we should truly be supermen. Do you know what one man would be if he were a master of science, medicine, engineering, geology, painting, music, and, in fact, a hundred different realms of endeavor, one of which ordinarily would require a lifetime of close application to master?" He paused, smiled brilliantly, and then went on: "He would be a White Wizard."

8

INEZ did not appear at dinner that night; and when Phil remarked upon her absence, Mendoza explained that she had a headache. Phil was disappointed, for he had been anticipating an evening with her.

He did not join Tom and Mendoza in the study, where they were having their smoke. The cool night air tempted him, and he went out to wander in the open. He recollected with a thrill of pleasure his meeting with Inez that morning, and was drawn toward the spot where he had found her. As he approached, a low sob from the direction of the stone assured him that he was not the only one who remembered that pleasant hour at the beginning of the day. In a moment he was beside her little huddled form. She was crying, softly.

Gently he took her hands from her face. "What is the matter?" he asked her.

She tried to draw away, but he held her tight. Her shining hair framed her face like a halo, and her delicate features were ethereal in the soft moonlight. After trying in vain to loosen his hold, she turned upon him and whispered brokenly:

"Phil—Mr. West, for my sake—for your own sake, go away from here tomorrow. It will mean nothing but sorrow and regret to both of us if you stay longer."

"Why should I go?" he demanded. "What is there to fear?"

"My uncle," she murmured.

The wind fluttered the silk scarf that she wore against his face, and his blood leaped madly. His arms closed about her drooping form and he crushed her close. For a moment he buried his hot face in her fragrant, silky hair. Blindly he found her lips and kissed her, long and deep, until her slight body shivered. It was many minutes before he found voice to say huskily:

"Can you get ready tomorrow to go back to New York with me?"

Like a startled wild thing, she drew away from him. "Oh, what have you done?" she moaned. "Leave me! Go! Leave this place tonight—now!"

He held her off and stared at her in amazement. "You love me—don't you?" he faltered. "Then why shouldn't you wish to be my wife? I know that I'm not worthy of you; but am I not a better companion than your grim uncle?"

Her face paled. "I do love you,"

she replied simply. "I love you very dearly; and I shall be unhappy when you leave me. But you must go."

"Why?"

"You do not know my uncle. He will kill you. He suspects that we love each other." She hid her face against his arm. "And I've known you but two days."

With a low laugh, he again gathered her toward him. "What a foolish little girl you are," he soothed, stroking her hair. "Don Julian will be glad to have a millionaire for a nephew-in-law. Have we known each other but two days?" He tilted her face until he could look into her averted eyes. "It just proves that we are made for each other."

A sudden chill crept over him. He no longer tried to restrain her, and she slipped from his loosened arms and darted up the hill to the house. He wanted to follow, but his feet remained fixed to the ground. A blind, nameless fear enslaved every faculty, and the manhood froze within him. He tried to move, and could not; he strained his throat to scream or speak, but he was dumb.

His struggles to free himself from the strange inertia were suddenly and almost violently successful, for he nearly fell face forward on the ground. For no special reason, his feet jerked his body toward the tower. Some instinct seemed trying to convey to him the knowledge that a dangerous and destructive power lay at the point to which his body was moving. He fought against the compelling influence until he gasped for breath.

A growing weakness and weariness seized him, and he would have sunk in exhaustion to the ground, but for the strange force which held him submissive. He reached the door which led into the tower, found it unlocked, and his hand mechanically swung it open.

Step by step his enslaved feet mounted the spiral stairs. His face smarted with fever, and his eyes stared wildly before and above him. He reached the top landing of the stairs and paused for a moment, with every shred of his will-power pitted against the malign power that was plunging him onward. But, step by step, his feet, like lumps of lead, moved forward, and his hand encircled the door knob.

The door opened and he met the eyes of Mendoza—the great, dead black eyes that seemed to bore into his very heart. Here was the magnet which had attracted him. Body and soul and mind were enthralled by that fascinating gaze. He was choking, drowned in those inky, smothering bays.

Mendoza was seated before a table. On his head was the bright metal cap that Phil had seen him wear on the previous night.

"I summoned you to come to me," he announced.

An icy shiver trembled over Phil. Helplessly his eyes whisked about the disordered laboratory. In a corner crouched Pete, closely watching Mendoza. The sight of the man-like animal was a relief to Phil, for he felt that he was not entirely alone with the White Wizard.

"Señor West," said Mendoza crisply, "I have a few questions to propound. Tell me, how do we convey our thoughts to one another?"

"Er—by speaking—or writing—and sometimes by signs," hesitated Phil, speaking like a frightened schoolboy.

"Are they the only ways?"

"Yes."

"They are not. They are indeed the primitive methods. Man is still primeval in this respect. In the early ages man and beast alike had only their voices by which they could convey their feelings and desires. Then man rose a little higher than the beast; he learned to speak, and then to write, which is but a silent form of speech. He has been speaking and

writing for thousands of years, and has never discovered a better way."

He paused in dramatic silence. The faint ticking of Phil's watch could be heard. Then again came the rich, mellow tones which burned into the young man's brain and caused his heart to quicken.

"It is known that a brain never loses an idea that it once conceives. The thought may sink into the subconscious mind and never be recalled, but it has graven its image upon the brain. Then why can we not discover some method to recover these buried treasures?"

He walked up and down the room excitedly, with flushed cheeks and clenched fists. Then he stood still and swept his hand toward a shelf filled with labeled glass jars, each one containing a human brain immersed in a preservative.

"There rests knowledge, genius of the highest type, *señor!*" he cried exultingly. "*It is mine!* I am the most learned man that ever lived. I have the key to every art and science in the world. The minds of the powerful and the wise are at my command."

He reached up for one of the glass jars and turned the label toward Phil:

"Fabio Longinotti, violinist; died 1893."

"This brain," continued Mendoza, "dead thirty-five years, gave me my knowledge of the violin."

Aghast, Phil let his horrified eyes crawl over the long row of glass jars on the shelf. Here was the name of a great inventor; there a famous naturalist; there a noted French general who had died in the World War. All down the grim line he recognized names—names of men and women who had died recently; of others who had died a generation ago.

"In a few hours," came Mendoza's voice, "I can assimilate knowledge which required a whole lifetime to collect."

Pete stood up and came toward him. "Master!" fell from his coarse lips in a husky voice.

Mendoza put his hand on the ape's shoulder. "Pete also has learned from them," he said, pointing to the ghastly row on the shelf.

His sensitive fingers stroked his beard as he went on thoughtfully. "When we examine a brain, no matter if it is human or animal, we find that the cortex bears a visible record of the sensations and thoughts. Science has determined a few of the cortical centers, and various functions of consciousness have been localized fairly exactly. For example, the visual center of your brain is in the same area as the visual center of mine. If we had some means by which we could transfer the records of these various thought and sense centers, we could learn in a short time from the brain of a genius that which required years to wrest from the musty books of scholars, or from life and experience. In one week, from the brain of Longinotti, I acquired what a lifetime had put into its convolutions."

Phil stepped forward, forgetting his uneasiness. "Could anyone have gained immediate knowledge of music from the brain of Longinotti?"

"Yes. Now listen." He shuddered slightly. "In those labeled jars are the brains of great thinkers—and of others. I have made their thought-records mine. Understand what this means. Each individual is limited in his thinking and accomplishments. One can be a great writer, or an artist, or a philosopher, or a successful business man; but he can not be all these unless he lives several hundred years. The natural acquisition of knowledge is slow. But when one man has the brains of a dozen geniuses to draw from, he is a power—a superman!"

He raised his head with conscious dignity, and it seemed to Phil that his presence filled the room and crowded against him, until he breathed with difficulty.

The ape, with veneration in his

small eyes, crept to Mendoza's feet and threw his great, hairy arms around them.

"Master!" he muttered.

Mendoza stooped and placed his hands upon the animal's head. "Ah, Pete, you and your master have both progressed!" His hands went to the metal cap on his head. "And now Señor West will learn something he did not know before."

He removed the cap and placed it upon Phil's head. Then he selected one of the glass jars on the shelf and connected it, by means of wires, with the metal cap.

"This," he explained, "is the brain of Psamaeris, who lived during the reign of Rameses III. His mummy lay entombed with the dust of three thousand years thick upon it, when I was fortunate enough to discover it; very fortunate, indeed, for only in rare instances were the brains left in a mummy by the embalmers. In ten minutes you shall learn from this mummy more than archeologists can learn in years of assiduous study.

"Now, listen carefully. For self-protection, you must control what you learn from Psamaeris. If you do not *will* your thoughts into a safe thought-center of this brain, you may experience certain horrors in the Egyptian's life that you'll regret, for his brain and yours become as one when I press the button. Think now of a battle scene on the desert, with the Sphinx and the pyramids in the background. You will connect your brain with a similar thought-center in the brain of Psamaeris. Think!"

IMMEDIATELY Phil's brain became abnormally active. He closed his eyes and dreamed. He was on a desert, surrounded by sad-eyed men in flowing robes, who spoke a language which was new yet familiar to him. The bearded men were shouting in battle. His dry lips opened, and he gave commands in the language of those around him. He roared at his followers, cursed and encouraged them, until a vast cry of victory thundered about. Then the sad-eyed, swarthy men gathered around and praised the name of Psamaeris, their mighty leader.

After a wild dash over the hot plain, he was seated in a white marble palace in Thebes. Before him lay the *Book of the Dead*. With a reed pen he wrote in it; and, as he wrote, the mystic signs seemed to fall from his stiff fingers like burning coals, and he felt the awful presence of Osiris himself. He filled many pages with the strange heiroglyphics, praising the wisdom and power of Rameses III.

The scene faded like the awakening from a dream, and Phil found himself sitting before Mendoza, who held the metal cap.

Phil brushed his hand over his eyes, and tried to summon a weak laugh. "What did you do—hypnotize me?" he inquired.

Mendoza's eyes flashed. "I demonstrated to you once before that I do not appreciate facetiousness," he said curtly. "Your brain, through the medium of thought-radio, has reproduced the thoughts of Psamaeris. Had I permitted the connection to continue uncontrolled, you would have experienced many of Psamaeris' joys and sorrows; you would even have gone through the agonies of his death when an enemy gave him a poisoned drink. In thought, I died with Psamaeris, as I died with the others. But come; words are weak. You must be made to understand. I will permit you to commune with—the White Wizard."

He fastened the contrivance again to Phil's head, and placed a similar one on his own head, both of them being connected by wires.

As he went toward the curtain to press a hidden button, a wave of repugnance swept over the young man. Through the open window he could see the sky banked with great clouds, cleft through by the cold, white rays of the moon. He shuddered nervously.

A thunderous roar began to pound against his ear drums. Through a blue mist he saw Mendoza take the chair in front of him. His brain was in a turmoil; it was bursting. From his nose and mouth flowed a great rush of blood, and he fell back senseless. When he regained consciousness, he looked into the pale face of Mendoza as the Spaniard bent over him.

"Ah," sighed Mendoza. "I should have known that none could climb to the heights of my mentality. You are yet too weak to read what is in my brain. Still I would glean what you know. I may learn something, and I never scorn a grain of knowledge. But I will protect you from myself."

He took the cap from Phil's head and replaced it with another. Then he once more went behind the curtain, pressed the button, and sat in the chair in front of Phil.

An itching, pulling sensation throbbed through Phil's head. Then came Mendoza's voice, in dreamy, broken sentences, relating many of the most intimate happenings of his life. More than once, the young man squirmed in his chair as Mendoza drew forth some cherished secret.

Suddenly Mendoza sat up straighter, and an expression of rage so distorted his face that Phil instinctively drew away. With a demoniacal shriek of passion, Mendoza tore the cap from his head and leaped to his feet. His face was bestial in its ferocity as he stood before the young man.

"Thief!" he screamed. "Like a thief you have stolen my Inez from me. Then die, thief!"

Snorting and quivering with passion, he raised his fist and dashed forward. Phil stumbled backward and threw out his arm to guard his face. Instantly he realized that he had no ordinary foe to confront. Mendoza was temporarily a maniac in his wrath and strength. He crouched as a tiger before its kill. His lips curled back beast-like from the teeth, and slaver rolled from his mouth.

Phil glanced swiftly around for something with which to defend himself, and his eyes fell upon Pete. A change had come over the ape. He was looking at Mendoza, but the look of subjugation was gone from his face, and in its place was the jungle beast's hatred for a cruel master off his guard. Phil took instant advantage of this.

"Pete!" he called softly—appealingly.

Pete sprang from his corner, brushing Phil aside with his great, hairy body, and faced his master with exposed fangs. Master and beast stood regarding each other in primitive malice.

Mendoza waved his fist threateningly. "Out of the way!" he commanded, trying to push the ape aside.

Pete did not move.

"Ungrateful brute!" shouted Mendoza. "Is this how you repay me for lifting you on a level with man?"

With a mighty blow he brought his fist down upon the ape's skull, and the animal's powerful form crashed in a heap to the floor. For a moment, Mendoza stood as one dazed. He passed his hand over his forehead and looked around. Sinking upon his knees, he lifted Pete's head. A groan rumbled from the animal, and he whispered:

"Master—my master!"

The effort brought a crimson flow of blood from his lips, and he fell back lifeless.

In an agony of remorse, Mendoza hovered over the body.

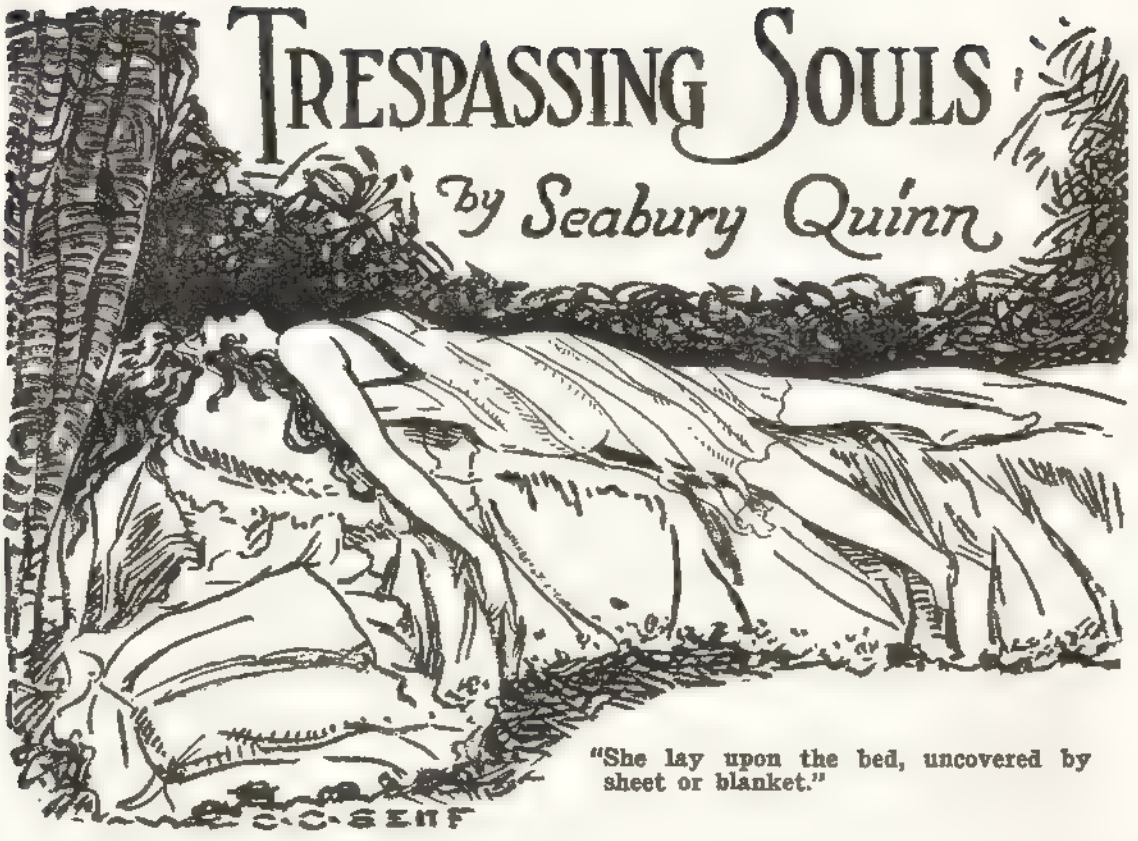
"Speak to me, Pete, you the noblest triumph of my genius. Speak!" he sobbed, shaking the body. "He is dead!" he muttered, rising to his feet.

Like a drunkard, he reeled to the window and gazed out at the speckled sky. Then he fell upon his knees, dropping his head to the low window-sill. A paroxysm of weeping shook his frame. He cried with all the passion and abandon of his race. Phil could

(Continued on page 429)

TRESPASSING SOULS

by Seabury Quinn



"She lay upon the bed, uncovered by sheet or blanket."

MID-AUGUST was on us and Harrisonville sweltered under the merciless combination of heat and humidity as only communities in the North Atlantic States can suffer in such conditions. Jules de Grandin and I rocked listlessly back and forth in our willow chairs, too much exhausted for further conversation, unhappily aware that the clock had struck midnight half an hour before, but knowing bed meant only a continuation of discomfort and unwilling to make even the little effort involved in ascending the stairs and disrobing.

"*Morbleu*, Friend Trowbridge," the little Frenchman murmured sleepily, "this day, it is infernal, no less. Were those three old Hebrews transported here, I damn think they would beseech us to take them back to the comforting coolness of Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace! If——"

The muffled drum-roll of my office telephone bell sounded a sleepy interruption to his comment, and I rose wearily to respond to the summons.

"Yes," I answered as a frightened voice pronounced my name questioningly over the wire, "this is Dr. Trowbridge."

"This is Aubrey Sattalea," the caller told me. "Can you come over to 1346 Pavonia Avenue right away, please? My wife is very ill—heat prostration, I'm afraid. If she doesn't get help soon, I fear——"

"All right," I interrupted, making a note of the address and reaching for my hat, "fill a hot-water bottle and put it at her feet, and if you've any whisky that's fit to drink, give her a little in water and repeat the dose every few minutes. I'll be right along."

In the surgery I procured a small flask of brandy, some strychnin and

digitalis, two sterile syringes, alcohol and cotton sponges, then shoved a bottle of quinine tincture into the bag as an added precaution.

"Better run along to bed, old chap," I advised de Grandin as I opened the front door. "I've been called to attend a woman with heat prostration, and mayn't be back till morning. Just my luck to have the car laid up for repairs when there's no possibility of getting a taxi," I added gloomily, turning to descend the front steps.

The Frenchman rose languidly and retrieved his wide-brimmed Panama from the porch floor. "Me, I suffer so poignantly, it is of no moment where I am miserable," he confided. "Permit me to come, too, my friend. I can be equally unhappy walking beside you in the street or working beside you in the sickroom."

THE Sattalea cottage was a pretty example of the Colonial bungalow type-modified Dutch architecture with a low porch covered by an extension of the sloping roof and all rooms on the ground floor. Set well back from the double row of plane-trees bordering the avenue's sidewalks, its level lawn was bisected by a path of sunken flagstones leading to the three low steps of the veranda. Lights showed behind the French windows letting into a bedroom at the right end of the porch, and the gentle flutter of pongee curtains and the soft whining of an electric fan told us the activities of the household were centered there. Without the formality of knocking we stepped through the open window into the room where Vivian Sattalea lay breathing so lightly her slender bosom scarce seemed to move at all.

She lay upon the bed, uncovered by sheet or blanket, only the fashionably abbreviated green-voile nightrobe veiling her lissome body from the air. Her soft, copper-gold hair, worn in a shoulder bob, lay damply about her small head on the pillow, and her delicate, clean-cut features had the smooth, bloodless semi-transparence of a face cunningly molded in wax.

"*La pauvre!*" de Grandin murmured as I introduced myself to the frightened young man who hovered, hot-water bottle in hand, beside the unconscious woman, "*La belle, pauvre enfant!* Quick, Friend Trowbridge, her plight is worse than we supposed; haste is imperative!"

As I undid the fastenings of my emergency kit he advanced to the bed, took the girl's wrist between his fingers and fixed his eyes intently on the dial of the diminutive watch strapped to the under side of her left wrist. "Seventy"—he counted slowly, staring at the little timepiece—"*non*, sixty-seven—sixty——"

Abruptly he dropped her hand and bent down till his slim, sensitive nostrils were but an inch or so from the girl's gently parted lips.

"*Sacré bleu, Monsieur,* may I ask where you obtained the liquor with which you have stimulated your wife?" he demanded, staring with a sort of incredulous horror at Sattalea.

The young husband's cheeks reddened. "Why—er—er," he began, but de Grandin cut him short with an impatient gesture.

"No need," he snapped, rising and regarding us with blazing eyes. "*C'est la prohibition, pardieu!* When this poor one was overcome by heat, it was Dr. Trowbridge's order that you give her alcohol to sustain her, is it not so?"

"Yes, but——"

"'But' be everlastingly consigned to the flames of hell! The only stimulant which you could find was of the bootleg kind, is it not true?"

"Yes, sir," the young man admitted. "Dr. Trowbridge told me to give her whisky in broken doses, if I had it. I didn't, but I got a quart of gin a couple of weeks ago, and——"

"Name of a thousand small blue devils!" de Grandin half shrieked.

"Stand not there like a paralyzed bullfrog and offer excuses. Hasten to the kitchen and bring mustard and hot water, quickly. In addition to heat prostration, this poor child lies poisoned to the point of death with wooden alcohol. Already her pulse has almost vanished. Quick, my friend; rush, fly; even now it may be too late!"

Our preparations were made with feverish haste, but the little Frenchman's worst predictions were fulfilled. Even as I bent to administer the mixture of mustard and water which should empty the fainting woman's system of the deadly wood alcohol, her breast fluttered convulsively, her pale lids drew half-way open, disclosing eyes so far rolled back that neither pupil nor iris was visible, and her blanched, bloodless lips fell flaccidly apart as her chin dropped toward the curve of her throat and the fatuous, insensible expression of the newly dead spread over her pallid countenance like a blight across a stricken flower.

"*Hélas,* it is finished!" de Grandin rasped in a furious whisper. "Let those who sponsor such laws as those which make poisonous liquor available accept responsibility for this poor one's death!"

He was still swearing volubly in mingled French and English as we walked down the flagstone pathway from the house, and in the blindness of his fury all but collided with an undersized, stoop-shouldered man who paused speculatively on the sidewalk a moment, then turned in at the entrance to the yard and sauntered toward the cottage.

"*Pardonnez-moi, Monsieur,*" de Grandin apologized, stepping quickly aside, for the other made no move to avoid collision, "it is that I am greatly overwrought, and failed to——

"*Morbleu,* Friend Trowbridge, the ill-mannered *canaille* has not the grace to acknowledge my amends. It is not to be borne!" He wheeled in his tracks, took an angry step after the other, then stiffened abruptly to a halt and paused irresolute a second, like a bird-dog coming to a "point." With an imperative, half-furtive gesture he bade me follow, and stepped silently over the grass in the wake of the discourteous stranger.

SILENTLY we ascended the path and crept up the porch steps, tiptoeing across the veranda to the open window letting into the room of death. The Frenchman's raised finger signaled me to halt just beyond the line of light shining through the midnight darkness, and we paused in breathless silence as a soft, suave voice inside addressed the stricken husband.

"Good evening, sir," we heard the stranger say, "you seem in trouble. Perhaps I can assist you?"

A heart-wrenching, strangling sob from young Sattalea was the only answer.

"Things are seldom as bad as they seem," the other pursued, his words, pronounced in a sort of silky monotone, carrying distinctly, despite the fact that he spoke with a slight lisp. "When ignorant quacks have failed, there are always others to whom you can turn, you know."

Another sob from the prostrated husband was his sole reply.

"For instance, now," the visitor murmured, almost as though speaking to himself, "two witless charlatans just told you that your love is dead—so she is, if you wish to accept *their* verdict, but——"

"*Monsieur,*" de Grandin stepped across the window-sill and fixed his level, unwinking stare on the intruder, "I do not know what game it is you play; but I make no doubt you seek an unfair advantage of this poor young man. It were better for you that you went your way in peace, and that immediately; else——"

"Indeed?" the other surveyed him with a sort of amused contempt. "Don't you think it's *you* who'd best

be on his way? You've already broken his heart with your ignorant inability to tell the difference between life and death. Must you add insults to injury?"

De Grandin gasped in a sort of unbelieving horror as he grasped the import of the stranger's accusation. On the bed before us, her pale features somewhat composed by the little Frenchman's deft hands, lay the corpse of the woman we had seen die an hour before; after thirty years of general practise and a full term of hospital duty, I knew the signs of death as I knew the symptoms of chicken-pox, and de Grandin had vast experience in the hospitals of Paris, the military lazarets of the War and infirmaries throughout the world; yet this interloper told us to our faces we were mistaken.

Yet, despite the fellow's impudence, I could not help a sudden twinge of doubt. He was unquestionably impressive, though not pleasantly so. Shorter, even, than the diminutive de Grandin, his height was further curtailed by the habitual stoop of his shoulders; indeed, there was about him the suggestion of a hunched back, though closer inspection showed no actual deformity. His face, narrow, pointed and unnaturally long of chin, was pale as the under side of a crawling reptile, and despite the sultriness of the night showed no more evidence of perspiration than if his skin possessed no sweat-glands. Clothed all in black he was from the tips of his dull-kid shoes to the wide-brimmed felt hat upon his sleek, black hair, and from his stooping shoulders there hung a knee-length cape of thin black silk which gave him the look of a hovering, unclean carrion bird which waited only the opportunity to swoop down and revel in an obscene feast. But his eyes attracted and repelled me more than anything. They were dark, not black, but of an indeterminate, slate-like shade, and glowed brightly in his toad-belly-white face like corpse lights flickering through the eye-holes of a death mask.

His thin, bloodless lips parted in a sardonic smile which was more than half snarl as he turned his cloaked shoulder on de Grandin, addressing young Sattalea directly. "Do you want to take the word of these ignoramuses," he asked, "or will you take my assurance that she is not dead, but sleeping?"

A look of agonized hope flamed up in Sattalea's face a moment. "You mean——" he choked, and the other's soft rejoinder cut his incredulous question in two:

"Of course; it is but the work of a moment to call the wandering spirit to its tenant. May I try?"

"Do not heed him, my friend!" de Grandin cried. "Trust him not, I implore you! I know not what vile chicanery he purposes to practise, but——"

"Be still, you!" Sattalea commanded. "The man is right. You've had your chance, and the best you did was tell me my poor darling is dead. Give him a chance. Oh"—he stretched imploring hands to the sinister stranger—"I'll give my soul, if you will——"

"*Monsieur*, for the love of the good God, think what it is you say!" de Grandin's shouted injunction drowned out the desperate man's wild offer. "Let this blood brother of Iscariot work his evil if you must; but offer not your soul for sale or barter as you hope one day to stand in spiritual communion with her who was your earthly love!"

The trembling, eager husband ignored the Frenchman's admonition. "Do what you will," he begged. "I'll give you anything you ask!"

The stranger chuckled softly to himself, threw back the corners of his sable cloak as though fluttering unclean wings preparatory to flight, and leaned above the dead woman, pressing lightly on her folded eyelids with long, bony fingers which seemed never

to have known the warmth of human blood in their veins. His pale, thin lips writhed and twisted over his gleaming animal-like teeth as he mouthed an incantation in some tongue I could not understand. Yet as he raised his voice in slight emphasis once or twice I saw de Grandin's slim nostrils tighten with quickly indrawn breath, as though he caught a half-familiar syllable in the mutterings.

The stranger's odd, nondescript eyes seemed fairly starting from their shallow sockets as he focused a gaze of demoniacal concentration on the still, dead face before him, and over and over again he droned his formula, so that even I caught the constant repetition of some word or name like *Sathanas—Barran-Sathanas* and *Yod-Sathanas*.

I saw de Grandin mop his forehead as he shook his head impatiently, clearing his eyes of the perspiration which trickled downward from his brow, and take a short half-step forward with extended hand, but next moment both he and I stood stone-still in our places, for, as a crumb of cochineal dropped into a glass of milk incarnadines the white fluid, so a faintest flush of pink seemed creeping and spreading slowly in the dead woman's face. Higher and higher, like the strained shadow of a blush, the wave of color mounted, touched the pallid lips and cheeks, imparted a dim but unmistakable glow of life to the soft curving throat and delicate, cleft chin. A flutter, scarcely more than the merest hinted flicker of motion, animated the blue-veined lids, and a sudden spasmodic palpitation rippled through the corpse's breast.

"It is not good—no good can come of it——" de Grandin began, but Sattalea cut him short.

"You may go!" he shouted, glaring at the little Frenchman across the resurrected body of his wife. "I don't want to see you—either of you again. You damned quacks, you——"

De Grandin stiffened and his face went almost as pale as the mysterious stranger's under the insult, but he controlled himself with an almost superhuman effort. "*Monsieur,*" he answered with frigid courtesy, "I congratulate you on your seeming good fortune. Pray God you need not call on us again!"

With a bow of punctilious formality he turned on his heel to leave the house, but the stranger sent a parting shaft of spiteful laughter flying after him. "No fear of that," he promised. "Hereafter I shall minister to this house, and——"

"The Devil can quote Scripture for his evil ends," the Frenchman interrupted sharply. "I make no doubt his servants sometimes simulate the holy miracles for purposes as sinister. Some day, perhaps, *Monsieur,* we shall match our powers."

"FOR heaven's sake," I asked in bewilderment as we walked slowly through the tree-leafed avenue, "what *was* it we saw back there? I'll stake my professional reputation we saw that woman die; yet that queer-looking fellow seemed to have no more trouble reviving her than a hypnotist has in waking his subject."

The little Frenchman removed his red-banded Panama and fanned himself with its wide brim. "*Le bon Dieu* only knows," he confessed. "Me, I do not like it. Undoubtlessly, the woman died—we saw her. Unquestionably, she was revived, we saw that, too; but *how?* The grip of death is too strong to be lightly loosed, and though I could not understand all the words he said, I most distinctly heard him pronounce the ancient Devil Worshipers' term for Satan not once, but many times. I greatly fear, my friend—*cordieu,* have the care!" he broke off, leaping forward and flinging himself bodily on a short, stout man in clerical garb, hurling him backward to the sidewalk.

Walking with bowed head and mumbling lips the priest had descended from the curb into the path of a hurrying, noiseless motor-car, and but for the Frenchman's timely intervention must inevitably have been run down.

"*Mille pardons,*" de Grandin apologized as he assisted the astonished cleric to his feet, "I am sorry to have startled you, but I think no damage has been done, whereas, had I not acted in time——"

"Say no more," the clergyman interrupted in a rich, Irish brogue. " 'Tis glad I am to be able to curse ye for your roughness, sir. Sure, 'tis time I was payin' more attention to me feet, anyhow. It's the Lord Himself, no less, provides protection for such as I. You, now, sir, were the instrument of heaven, and I'm not so sure I didn't see an emissary from the other place not long ago."

"Indeed?" returned de Grandin. "I greatly doubt he could have prevailed against you, Father."

"Sure, and he did not," the other replied, "but I was after thinkin' of him as I walked along, and 'twas for that reason I so nearly stepped to me own destruction a moment hence. One o' me parishioners down the street here was called to heaven a little time ago, and I got there almost too late to complete anointin' her. As I was comin' from the house, who should be strollin' up the steps, as bold as brass, but the very divil himself, or at least one o' his most trusted agents.

" 'Good evenin', Father,' says he to me, as civil as ye please.

" 'Good evenin' to ye, sir,' I replies.

" 'Are ye, by anny chance, comin' from a house o' death?' he wants to know.

" 'I am that,' I answers, 'and, if I'm not bein' too bold, what affair is it of yours?'

" 'Are ye sure the pore woman is dead?' he demands, fixin' me with a pair o' eyes that niver changed expression anny more than a snake's.

" 'Dead, is it?' says I. 'How ye know 'tis a woman who lies in her last sleep in yonder house I've no idea, and I don't propose to inquire, but if ye're wantin' to know whether or not she's dead, I can tell ye she is. Sure, 'tis meself that's been ministerin' to the dead and dyin' for close to fifty years, and when the time comes that I can't recognize those the hand o' the Lord has touched, I'll be wearin' me vestments for the last long time, so I will.'

" 'Oh, but,' he answers, cool as anny cucumber, 'I think perhaps she's still alive; perhaps she's not dead, but sleepin'. I shall endeavor to awake her.' And with that he makes to push past me into the house.

" 'Ye *will* not,' I tells him, barrin' his way. 'I've no idea what sort o' play-actin' ye're up to, young felly, but this I tell ye, Bernardine McGuffy lies dead in that house, and her soul (God rist it!) has gone where neither you nor anny mortal man can reach it. Stand away from that door, or I'll forget I'm a man o' peace and take me knuckles from the side o' your face, so I will.'

"With that he turns away, sirs, but I'm tellin' ye I've niver before seen a human face which more resembled the popular conception o' the Prince o' Darkness than his did that minute, with his long chin, his pale, corpse cheeks and the wicked, changeless expression in his starin', snaky eyes. I——"

"*Pardieu,* do you say it?" de Grandin interpreted excitedly. "Tell me, *Monsieur l'Abbé,* did your so mysterious stranger dress all in black, with a silken cloak draping from his shoulders?"

"Indeed and he did!" the priest replied. "When first I saw him he was standin' and starin' at the house where poor Bernardine died as though debatin' with himself whether or not to enter it, and it was the long black

cloak o' him—like the wings o' some dirty buzzard who did but wait his time to flap up to the window o' the room o' death—which first made me mind him particularly."

"U'm? and this was when, if you please?"

"An hour ago, I'd say. I was delayed on me way home by two sick calls—not that I had to make 'em, ye understand, but there I was in the neighborhood, and the pore children were sufferin' with the heat, as were their mothers, also. What use are us old fellies who are childless for the sake o' God if not to minister to all His sufferin' little ones?"

"Precisely," de Grandin agreed, raising his hat formally as he turned to leave. To me he murmured as we pursued our homeward way:

"Is it not redolent of the odor of fish, Friend Trowbridge? Half an hour before Madame Sattalea dies this cloaked man appears at another house hard on the tracks of the angel of death, and would have forced entrance had not the sturdy Irish priest barred his way. And did you also note the evil one used the same words to the good father that he addressed to the poor young Sattalea before he worked his devilish arts upon the dead woman—'She is not dead, but sleeping'? *Cordieu,* I think perhaps I spoke more truly than I knew when I remarked the devil can quote Scripture for his purposes. I can not see far into this matter, but nothing I have seen so far looks good."

A TALL, rather good-looking young man with prematurely gray hair and the restrained though by no means cheerless manner of his profession rose from one of the rockers on my front porch as de Grandin and I approached the house. "Good evening, Dr. Trowbridge," he greeted. "Old Mr. Eichelberger passed away a while ago, and the boss asked me to run over and get you to give us a certificate. There's not much doing tonight, and I figured you'd probably be awake anyhow; I shouldn't have minded if you couldn't have seen me, though—I'd as lief be driving around as sitting in the office on a night like this."

"Oh, good evening, McCrea," I answered, recognizing the chief assistant to Coroner Martin, who is also the city's leading funeral director. "Yes, I'll sign the certificate for you. Dr. Renshaw helped me in the case, and was actually in attendance this evening, but I've been formally in charge, so the registrar will take my certificate, I suppose. We gave up hope for the poor old gentleman yesterday afternoon; can't do much with interstitial nephritis when the patient's over seventy, you know."

"No, sir," the young mortician agreed, accepting a cigarette from de Grandin's proffered case.

As I returned from the office with the filled-in death certificate, the two of them were deeply immersed in shop talk. "Yes, sir," McCrea was telling de Grandin, "we certainly run up against some queer things in our business. Take what happened this evening, for instance: Mr. and Mrs. Martin had gone out to see some friends, and Johnson, the regular night man, was out on a call, so I was alone in the office. A chap I knew when I was studying at Renouard's called me up from Hackettstown, and I'd just run off when I noticed a shadow falling across the desk. I tell you, sir, I almost jumped out of my chair when I glanced up and saw the darndest-looking individual you ever saw not three feet away and smiling at me like a pussy-cat saying good evening to a canary. The screen door to the office was latched, though not locked, and anybody coming in would have been obliged to rattle the handle, you'd have thought, but there this fellow was, almost down my throat, and I hadn't heard so much as a footstep till I saw him.

"He was an undersized little pipsqueak, bony as a shad and pale as a

clown, with a funny-looking black cape, something like those trick overcoats the dukes wear in the European movies, hanging from his shoulders. Can you tie that—wearing a cape on a night like this?"

"*A-a-ah?*" de Grandin's interjection was so low I could scarcely hear it, but so sharp it seemed to cut through the sultry summer darkness like a razor. "Say on, my friend; I am all attention."

"Humph. I shouldn't be much surprized if there's somebody missing when they call the roll at the Secaucus asylum tomorrow morning, sir. What d'ye think this funny-looking chap wanted?"

"*Cordieu,* I can damn imagine," de Grandin murmured, "but I would prefer that you tell me!"

"No, sir, you don't," the other replied with a chuckle. "You could sit there and guess for a month o' Sundays, but you'd never suspect what he was up to. Listen:

" 'Good evening, sir,' he said, grinning at me all the time as if he'd enjoy biting a hunk out of my neck; 'are you interested in money?'

" 'Now, what's this, a touch or a stock salesman working overtime?' I asked myself as I looked him over. 'Sure, I am,' I answered. 'Know anyone who isn't?'

"With that he reaches down into his pocket and fishes out a roll of bills—most of 'em yellow, too—big enough to make a hippopotamus take two bites, and sort o' ruffled 'em through his fingers, as a professional gambler might play with the cards before commencing to shuffle. 'I have need of a woman's corpse in my scientific work,' he told me, still ruffling the loose ends of the bills against his thumb. 'If you have such an one here, and it is as yet unembalmed, I will pay you any amount you ask for it.'

"He stopped and stared hard at me with those queer eyes of his, and I could feel the hairs on the back of my neck beginning to stand up like those on a tom-cat's tail when he sees a bulldog coming toward him. Positively, Dr. de Grandin, the fellow had me almost groggy, just looking at me, and the harder I tried to look away the harder I seemed to have to stare at him.

" 'Money, much, much money,' he kept repeating in a kind o' solemn singsong whisper. 'Money to buy liquor, fine clothes, motor-cars, the favors of beautiful women—all these shall be yours if you will let me have a woman's corpse. See, I will give you——'

" 'You and who else?' I yelled, jumping up and reaching into the drawer where we keep a pistol for emergencies. 'Get to hell out o' here before I fix you so's they'll have to hold an inquest on you!'

"I reckon I sort o' flew off the handle, sir, for he was a harmless sort of nut, after all, but that funny get-up of his and the soft, sneaky way he had of speaking, and those devilish, unchanging eyes of his all together just about got my goat. Honestly, I believe I'd have let him have a bullet just for luck in another minute."

"And what time was this, if you please?" the Frenchman demanded sharply.

"Almost exactly twelve o'clock, sir. I can place it by the fact that the door had hardly shut on the lunatic when the call to take charge of Mr. Eichelberger's remains came over the 'phone, and, of course, I entered the time up on the arrangement card. The boss came in a minute or so later and said he'd take the call himself while I came over here to get the death certificate."

"Ah?" de Grandin breathed. Then, in a more natural tone he added: "You are doubtlessly right, my friend. Some poor one has made good his escape from the asylum, and wanders about under the delusion that he is a great scientist. Let us hope he

startles no more members of your noble calling with his offers of princely bribes."

"Not much fear of that," the young man returned with a chuckle as he turned to descend the porch steps. "I think I put the fear o' God into him when I flashed that gun. He may be crazy, but I don't think he has any special craving to stop a bullet."

"Trowbridge, *mon vieux,*" de Grandin almost wailed as the young embalmer entered his motor and drove off, "I shall go wild, *caduc*—crazy like a hatter. Behold the facts: This same damnation man in black goes first to an *entrepreneur des pompes funèbres* and attempts to buy a corpse; next he appears before the house where a woman lies newly dead, and would have forced an entrance. Foiled there, he crops up as if by unclean magic at the very door of Monsieur Sattalea's house almost before we have composed poor, dead Madame Sattalea's limbs. *Mordieu,* it is wicked, it is iniquitous, it is most devilishly depraved, no less! Like a carrion crow, scenting the corpse-odor from afar, he comes unerringly to the place of death, and always he asks for a female cadaver. Twice repulsed, at the third trial he meets success. What in the name of three thousand little blue devilkins does it portend?"

"If we hadn't seen that uncanny show at Sattalea's I'd say McCrea was right, and the fellow's an escaped lunatic," I answered, "but——"

"Ah, *hélas,* we have always that fearful 'but' making mock of us," he rejoined. "When first I saw this Monsieur of the Black Cloak I liked his looks little. To one who has battled with the powers of evil as I have, there is a certain family resemblance among all those who connive with devilishness, my friend. Therefore, when I did behold that colorless, cadaverish face of his silhouetted against the evening air, I determined to follow him quietly into the Sattalea house and see what he would do. *Dieu de Dieu,* we did observe a very great plenty. I was wondering about him and the means he might conceivably have employed to bring about Madame Sattalea's seeming revivement when we met the good *curé* and learned from him of the Black One's attempt to break into another dead woman's house; now, *parbleu,* after hearing Monsieur McCrea's story, I am greatly afraid! What it is I fear I do not now. I am like a timid little boy who ventures into the darkened nursery; all about me are monstrous, dreadful things the nature of which I can not descry. I put forth my hand, there is nothing there; but always in the darkness, just beyond the reach of my groping fingers, leers and gibbers the undefined shadow of something terrible and formless. *Cordieu,* my friend, we must make a light and view this terror of the darkness face to face! It shall not play hide-and-go-seek with us. No!"

3

A MILD epidemic of summer grippe kept me fully occupied for the succeeding two weeks, and de Grandin was left largely to his own devices. Whether he sought the key to the mystery of the man in black, and under what particular door-mat he looked for it I do not know, for the little Frenchman could be as secretive at some times as he was loquacious at others, and I had no wish to excite his acid comments by bringing the matter up unasked.

One Friday afternoon when August was slowly burning out with its own intensity, we were strolling leisurely toward the City Club, intent on a light luncheon to be followed by a round of golf at the Sedgemoor links when our attention was called to a little boy. Sturdy and straight as a young live-oak he was, his bright, fair hair innocent of covering, his smooth, fair skin tanned to the rich hue of ripened fruit, the sort of lad to give

every middle-aged bachelor a twinge of regret and make him wonder if his freedom had been worth while, after all. I smiled involuntarily as my eyes rested on him, but the smile froze on my lips as I noticed the expression of abject misery and fright on his little, sunburned face.

De Grandin noted the lad's affrighted look, too, and paused in quick sympathy. "*Holà*, my little cabbage," he greeted, his small blue eyes taking in every detail of the obviously terrified child, "what is it troubles you? Surely affairs can not be so dreadful?"

The lad looked at him with the trustful gaze all children instinctively bestowed on one they felt to be their friend, and his red, babyish lips trembled pitifully as great tears welled up in his eyes. "I dropped the rice, sir," he answered simply. "Mother sent me to the grocery for it, 'cause they forgot to send it with the rest of the order, and I dropped it. The—the bag broke, and I couldn't gather it up, though I tried ever so hard, and—she'll beat me! She beats me every day, now."

"*Tiens*, is it so?" the Frenchman replied. "Be of courage. I shall give you the price of another sack of rice, and your excellent *mère* shall be none the wiser."

"But she told me to hurry," the little chap protested, "and if I'm late I'll be whipped anyway."

"But this is infamous!" Sudden rage flamed in de Grandin's small round eyes. "Come, we shall accompany you. I shall explain all to your *maman*, and all shall be well."

With all the confidence in the world the little boy slipped his small, brown fist into de Grandin's slim white hand and together we walked down the street and turned into the smoothly clipped front yard of—the Sattalea cottage.

Someone was playing the piano softly as we ascended the porch steps, the haunting, eery notes of Saint-Saens' *Danse Macabre* falling lightly on our ears as we crossed the porch. Fearfully, on tiptoe, the lad led us toward an open French window, then paused timorously. "If *he's* with her I'll surely catch it!" he whispered, hanging back that we might precede him into the house. "He holds me while she beats me, and laughs when I cry!"

De Grandin caught his breath sharply at the little boy's announcement, and his small face was stern as he stepped softly into the semi-darkened drawing-room. Seated on the bancal before a baby grand piano, her body swaying gently with the rhythm of the music, was a woman — Vivian Sattalea. As I glanced at her delicate, clean-cut features framed in their aureole of rose-gold hair, the carmine of her parted lips blushing vividly against the milky whiteness of her face, I could not help feeling she had undergone some fundamental change since last I saw her. True, on the former occasion she had lain at the very door of death, whereas now she seemed in abundant health, but there was something more than the difference between sickness and health in her changed countenance. Despite her desperate condition when I saw her before, there had been a look of innate delicacy and refinement in the cameo-clear outline of her face. Today there was something theatrical—professional—in her beauty. The ruddy blondness and expert arrangement of her hair, the sophisticated look in her violet eyes, the lines about her full, too-red lips were those of the woman who lives by the exploitation of her charms. And in the flare of her nostrils, the odd tightness of the flesh above her cheek-bones and the hungry curves about her petulant, yearning mouth there was betrayed a burning greed for primal atavistic emotion scarcely to be slaked though every depth of passion be plumbed to the nadir.

Even as we halted at the window, undecided how best to announce our advent, the woman abruptly ceased

playing and clutched at the keyboard before her with suddenly convulsed, clenching fingers, the long, polished nails fairly clawing at the polished ivory keys like the unsheathed talons of a feline. And as her hands clenched shut she leaned backward, turning her vivid, parted lips up in a voluptuous smile. From the shadow of the piano another shadow drifted quickly, halted beside the woman and bent downward swiftly to seize her in frenzied embrace.

I gasped in amazement. Holding Vivian Sattalea's cheeks between his hands, kissing her ripe, scarlet lips, was the man in black, the mysterious stranger who had called her errant soul back from God only knew what mystic space the night de Grandin and I pronounced her dead.

"*Cordieu,*" I heard the Frenchman murmur, "*c'est une affaire amoureuse!*"

"Your pardon, sir and *madame,*" he apologized after a discreet pause, "I would not for the world disturb your innocent pastime, but on the street I did meet *Madame's* little son, and——"

"That sneaking brat!" the woman rasped, freeing herself from her lover's embrace and rising to face de Grandin with furious, flaming cheeks. "I'll teach him to spy on me and drag strangers to the house to——"

"Excuse, please, *Madame,* you will do nothing whatever at all concerning the little man," de Grandin denied in a level, almost toneless voice. "When first we did encounter him in the street he told us he greatly feared a beating at your hands, and I took it on myself to guarantee him immunity. I would not have it said I have failed him."

"We'll see about that!" She took a swift step toward the cowering child, the cold fire of murderous hate gleaming in her eyes, but de Grandin interrupted.

"*Madame,*" he reminded, "you forget what it is I have said." Quick as a striking snake his hand shot out, grasping her wrist in a paralyzing grip and halting her in mid-stride.

"Oh!" she sobbed as his steely fingers bit cruelly into her yielding flesh. "Pontou," she turned to the black-clothed man, "will you let this insolent——"

De Grandin released her, but kept his body between her and the frightened child as he regarded the livid-faced man with cold, menacing eyes. "*Monsieur,*" he promised, clipping his words with metallic hardness, "should you care to resent any affront you may conceive *Madame* has suffered, I am at your service at any time and place you wish to name."

A moment he waited, his slender body braced for the assault he fully expected, then, as the other made no move, turned a contemptuous shoulder on the woman and her companion.

"Come, *mon brave,*" and he took the little boy's hand in his; "let us go. These, they are unworthy to share the company of men like us. Come away. Friend Trowbridge and I shall feed you bonbons and chocolate till you are most gloriously ill, then nurse you back to health again. We shall take you to see the animals at the zoo; we shall——"

"But see here, de Grandin," I expostulated as I followed him to the street, "you can't do this. It's against the law, and——"

"My friend," he assured me, "I have already done it. As for the law, if it would be respected it must be respectable. Any statute which compels a little man like this to live with such an unnatural parent is beneath all honest men's contempt."

HE WAS as good as his word. Little Aubrey Sattalea spent a glamorous afternoon with us at the zoological garden, stuffed himself to capacity with unwholesome sweetmeats and ate a dinner fit for a longshoreman that night.

The Frenchman was deep in the re-

lation of a highly original version of the story of Cinderella as we sat on the veranda after dinner when quick, angry steps sounded on the front path. "Where's that Frenchman, de Grandin?" a furious voice demanded as Aubrey Sattalea, senior, mounted the porch, his face working with rage. "Where's the man who came to my house and stole my little boy——"

"Here, at your very good service, *Monsieur,*" de Grandin announced, rising from his chair and bowing formally, but holding his supple body poised to resist any attack the other made. "As for stealing your fine little man, I pride myself upon it. They shall no longer torture him, though you and a thousand others seek to drag him back."

"What d'ye mean?" Sattalea demanded, advancing menacingly on the diminutive Frenchman.

"Come and see," de Grandin responded, backing slowly toward the hall. As Sattalea followed him into the house, he halted suddenly, snapped on the electric light and thrust his hand down the front of the child's white-linen blouse, ripping the garment open and turning it down to display the lad's slim, straight back. Sattalea and I gave simultaneous gasps of astonished horror. From shoulder to waist the child's back was a mess of crisscrossed, livid wales, the unmistakable signs of recent cruel beatings with a whip or small cane.

"Did *you* do this?" the Frenchman demanded, taking a threatening half step toward the visitor. "*Parbleu,* if you did, though you be twenty times his father, I shall beat you insensible!"

"Good Lord!" the horrified parent exclaimed. "Who—what——"

"Mother did it, Daddy," the little boy broke in sobbingly. "Since that night when she was so ill, that funny-looking man's been coming to the house every day and she's changed so. She says she doesn't love me any more and she beats me for almost nothing—I didn't mean to look in that day he kissed her—honestly, I didn't—but she said I was spying on them and the two of them beat me till——"

"Aubrey! What are you saying?" his father cried.

"*Morbleu,* no more than all the neighbors know, *Monsieur,*" de Grandin returned impassively. "This afternoon, when Friend Trowbridge and I had returned from our outing with your son, I took some magazines, which I pretended to sell, and my most persuasive manner to the back doors of the houses of your block. In one small hour's conversation with the domestic servants of the neighborhood I found that you alone are unaware of what goes on in your home."

Sattalea faced the Frenchman with a look of incredulous horror; then, as the import of de Grandin's words sank home, an expression of hopeless desolation spread over his face. "That explains it!" he sobbed. "She *has* changed since that night she di— you gentlemen gave her up for dead! She's grown more beautiful every day, but—but she's not my Vivian, not the girl I married. Sometimes I've felt as though some stranger had come to take her place, and——"

"*Monsieur,* I think it not unlikely," de Grandin spoke softly as he laid his hand on the man's shoulder with an almost fatherly gesture. "Believe me, I can appreciate your trouble. It were best that we did not make mock of Providence, my friend. It is better that we leave bad enough alone, lest it become worse. Alas, the olden days of happiness are gone forever; but we can at least repair the greater wrong before it has gone too far. Will you help me make your home a fit place for your little son to dwell, *Monsieur?*"

"Yes," Sattalea agreed. "I'll do anything you say. Sometimes I think it would have been better if Vivian really had died. She's a changed woman. She used to be so sweet, so

gentle, so loving, now she's a very devil incarnate, she's ——"

"Let us not waste time," de Grandin interrupted. "Tonight you will inform *Madame* your wife that you must leave town on business early in the morning. When all preparations are made for your seeming trip, you will come here, and remain hidden until I give the word. Then, *parbleu,* we shall show this species of a rat who would buy dead women's bodies who holds the stronger cards—whose magic is more potent—may the Devil, his master, roast me if we do not so!"

4

SHORTLY before noon the following day a taxicab deposited Aubrey Sattalea and several pieces of luggage at my front door, and after seeing the guest secreted in an upstairs room de Grandin excused himself, saying he had several important missions to execute. "Remember, my friend," he warned the visitor, "you are not to leave the house for any reason less urgent than fire, and you will refrain from so much as showing yourself at the window until I say otherwise. The secrecy of your whereabouts is greatly important, I assure you."

Dinner was about to be served when he returned, his little eyes shining with elated excitement. "See, my friends," he ordered as we finished dessert, "is it not a pretty thing which I obtained in New York this afternoon?" From his jacket pocket he drew a small case which he snapped open, displaying a tiny, shining instrument bedded in folds of cotton-wool.

It was a glass-and-nickel syringe of twenty-five minim size, with a short heavy slip-on needle attached. The piston was of ground glass, set on a metal plunger which led through a cap. On this plunger, instead of the usual metal set-screw, was a tiny, trigger-like safety lever which locked the piston so that the syringe could be carried full without danger of spilling its contents.

"H'm, I've never seen one quite like it," I admitted, examining the instrument with interest.

"Probably not," the Frenchman returned as he snapped the safety-catch on and off, testing its perfect response to the lightest pressure of his finger. "They are not widely known. For the average physician they are an unnecessary luxury, yet there are times when they are invaluable. In psychiatric work, for instance. The doctor who attends the mad often has need of a syringe which can carry quick unconsciousness, even as the soldier and gendarme has need of his pistol, and when he must draw and use his instrument at once there is no time to stop and fill it. *Voilà,* it is then this little tool becomes most handy, for it can be filled and carried about like a gun, rendered ready for action by the touch of the finger, and there has meantime been no danger of the drug it carries being lost. *C'est adroit, n'est-ce-pas?*"

"But what need have you for it?" I asked. "I don't understand——"

"But of course not," he agreed with a vigorous nod. "But if you will be so good as to wait a few hours—ah, I shall show you a tremendously clever trick, my friends. Meantime, I am wearied. I shall sleep four hours by the alarm clock; then, if you please, we shall perform our duty. Until then——"

Rising, he bowed formally to us in turn and ascended to his bedroom.

MIDNIGHT had sounded on the tall clock in the hall and twelve deep, vibrant strokes had echoed from the great gong in the courthouse tower before de Grandin rejoined us, refreshed by his four-hour nap and a cold shower. "Come, my friends," he ordered, filling his new syringe with a twenty per cent solution of cannabis indica and thrusting it hand-

ily into his jacket pocket, "it is time we repaired to the rendezvous."

"Where?" Sattalea and I demanded in chorus.

"Wait and see," he returned enigmatically. "Quick, Friend Trowbridge, the car, if you please."

Under his direction I drove to within a hundred feet or so of the Sattalea cottage, then parked the motor at the curb. Together we dismounted and stole softly toward the house.

All was quiet within the dwelling; not a light showed through the long, unshuttered windows, but de Grandin led the way unerringly across the porch, through the drawing-room and down the hall to the white-enameled door of the principal bedroom. There he paused, and in the flash of his pocket electric torch I saw his small, heart-shaped face twitching with excitement. "Are we ready?" he demanded, his narrow, black brows arched interrogatively.

I nodded. and he turned sharply, bearing his weight against the white panels of the door and forcing them inward. Next instant, de Grandin in the lead, Sattalea and I at his elbows, we entered the darkened room.

For a moment I saw nothing but the vague outlines of furniture, only dimly picked out by the moonlight filtering through the Venetian blinds which hung before the window, but as I paused, striving to accustom my eyes to the quarter-light, I made out the hazy, indistinct shape of something human, so still it seemed inanimate, yet somehow instinct with life and viciousness.

"*Permettez-moi,*" de Grandin exclaimed, feeling quickly along the wall for the electric switch, pressing the button and flooding the chamber with light. Beyond the bed, clad in pajamas and dressing-gown, crouched the white-faced, stoop-shouldered man who had proved such a mystery to us, his thin, evil features drawn in a snarling grimace of startled fury. Backed against the wall at the bedstead's head, rigid in an attitude of mingled fear and defiance, stood Vivian Sattalea. Her slim, white body showed statuesquely through the silken tissue of her nightrobe, her supple, rounded limbs and torso rather emphasized than concealed by the diaphanous garment. Her arms were extended straight down beside her, her hands pressing the wall against which she leaned till the flesh around the long, brightly polished nails showed little half-moons of white. Her red, passionate mouth was twisted in an animal-snarl of rage, and out of her purple eyes looked something which had never belonged to the woman Aubrey Sattalea married five years before—some evil trespasser in possession, some depraved interloper holding high holiday behind the windows of her soul.

"Vivian!" Sattalea looked in agonized disbelief from the crouching, slinking intruder to his wife, and his honest, commonplace young face seemed fairly to crumble with the devastation of overwhelming disillusion. "Oh, Vivi, how could you—and I loved you so!"

"Well, you silly, fatuous fool!" the woman's voice was thin and wire-edged as she spoke, and that evil, half-seen something seemed dodging back and forth in her wide-open eyes like a criminal lunatic playing hide-and-seek at the barred windows of his cell. "What did you think—did you expect me to put up with *you?* You——"

"Silence!" de Grandin's command, sharp as a whip-crack, cut through her tirade. "The time for speech is past. It is to act!"

Agilely as a leopard he leaped across the bed, his left hand seizing the crouching, corpse-faced man by the collar of his gown and forcing him backward on the couch. There was a short, fierce struggle, the flash of something bright in the electric light, then a muffled, strangling cry as de Grandin sank the needle of his hypodermic

in the other's arm, released the safety-catch and shot the plunger downward.

"Stop—stop, you're killing him!" the woman shrieked, leaping like an infuriated cat from her retreat against the wall and flinging herself on de Grandin, clawing at his face, gnashing at him with her teeth like a tigress fighting for her mate.

The Frenchman thrust his half-conscious antagonist from him with a vigorous shove of his foot, seized the woman's right wrist in his left hand and jerked her forward, so that she lay prone across the bed. As she writhed and twisted in his grip, he shot the hypodermic needle into her rounded arm and forced the piston down, emptying the last dregs of the powerful hypnotic drug into her veins. I saw the white skin around the needle-point swell like an oversized blister as the sense-stealing hashish flooded into her system, saw her red mouth close convulsively, as though she swallowed with an effort, then watched fascinated as her taut, lithe muscles went slowly limp, her lips fell senselessly apart and her eyes slowly closed, the lids fighting fiercely to stay open, and murderous, insatiable hatred looking from her face as long as a flicker of her eyes remained unveiled by the lowering lids.

"Quick, my friends!" de Grandin ordered as her body went flaccid in complete anesthesia. "We must hasten; the drug will not control for long, and we must attack while the barrier of their physical consciousness is down."

Under his directions we laid Vivian Sattalea and her paramour on the bedroom floor, and while Sattalea and I crossed their hands and feet after the manner of memorial effigies on mediæval tombs the Frenchman extracted four waxen candles from the inner pocket of his jacket, placed one at the head and another at the foot of each unconscious form.

Stooping quickly he traced a six-pointed figure in chalk on the bedroom rug, then snapped off the electric light and set the four candles aflame. "Do not step beyond the lines, my friends," he warned, pushing Sattalea and me inside the design he had drawn; "there will soon be that outside which no mortal can look on unprotected and live!"

As the candle flames burned brightly in the hot, still room, I noticed a subtle, indefinable odor, strangely similar to ecclesiastical incense yet differing from it in some way I could not define. There was something soporific about it, and I felt my lids go heavy as I inhaled, but was brought back to attentive consciousness by de Grandin's words. Bending ceremonially to the east, the south, finally to the west, with a sort of jerky genuflection, he had begun a low, singsong chant. The words he used I could not understand, for they were in some outlandish tongue, but constantly, like the recurrence of the name of Deity in a litany, I caught the surname Amalik, and mingled with it that of Suliman ebn Dhoud and other Arabic and Hebrew titles till the half-dark room seemed fairly redolent with the chanted Oriental titles.

"Look, look, *for God's sake, look!*" rasped Aubrey Sattalea in my ear, seizing my arm in a panic-strengthened grip and pointing toward the northwest corner of the room.

I looked, and caught my breath in a terrified sob.

Rearing nearly to the ceiling of the chamber, so indistinct that it was more like the fleeting, uncertain vision of an object behind us seen from the corner of the eye, there was a monstrous, fear-begetting form. When I gazed directly at it there was nothing but shadow to be seen, but the moment my eyes were partly averted it took sudden substance out of nothing, and its shape was like that of a mighty, black-robed man, and, despite the white beard which fell nearly to the hem of its garment, the being seemed not old as we are wont to consider

men, but rather strong with the strength which mighty age gives to giant trees and hills and other things which endure forever. And from the being's shadowy face looked forth a pair of terrifying, deep-set eyes which glowed like incandescent metal, and between its upraised, mighty hands there gleamed the wide blade of a sword which seemed to flicker with a cold, blue, phosphorescent light. Over all my body I could feel the rising of horripilation. The hairs upon my head and the shorter hairs of my hands and arms seemed rising stiffly, as though an electrical current ran through me, and despite my utmost efforts my teeth rattled together in the cachinnation of a chill; for the air about us had become suddenly gelid with that intense, numbing cold which means utter absence of vital heat.

"By the Three Known and One Unknown Elements; by the awful word whispered in the ears of the two Khirams by Shelomoh, the Temple-Builder"—de Grandin made the threefold signs of Apprentice, Fellowcraft and Master with flashing quickness—"by the mastery of Eternal Good over Evil, and by the righteousness of Him who planned the Universe, I bind you to my bidding, O Azra'il, dread Psychopompos and Bearer of the Sword!" De Grandin's voice, usually a light tenor, had deepened to a powerful baritone as he pronounced the awful words of evocation. "Come to my aid, O Powers of Light and of Darkness," he chanted. "To me are ye bound by the words of Power and Might, nor may ye depart hence till my will be done!"

A light wind, colder, if possible, than the freezing air of the room, seemed to emanate from the dreadful form in the darkened corner, making the candle flames flicker and the shadows flit and dance in arabesques across the walls and ceiling of the room. The unconscious man upon the floor moved slightly and groaned as though in nightmare, and the woman beside him shuddered as if the chilling wind had pierced even the barriers of her unconsciousness.

"Speak out, seducer of the dead, destroyer of the living!" de Grandin commanded, fixing his burning gaze on the groaning man. "I command you, declare to us your true name and nature!"

"Pontou," the voice issuing from the supine, drug-bound man was faint as an echo of a whisper, but in that silent room it sounded like a shout.

"Pontou is my name, my birthplace Brittany."

"And what did you there, Pontou?"

"I was clerk to Gilles de Laval, Sire de Retz, Marèchal of France, Chamberlain to His Majesty, the King, and cousin to the mighty Duke of Brittany.

"*Aie,* but there were brave doings in the château at Marchecoul when the Sire de Retz dwelt there! The castle chapel was gorgeous with painted windows and cloth of gold, the sacred vessels encrusted with gems, and churchly music sounded as the mass was celebrated thrice daily, but at night there was a different sort of mass, for with me as deacon and Henriet as subdeacon, before the desecrated altar of the Galilean Gilles de Retz celebrated *la messe noire,* and from the throats of little children we drew the 'red milk' wherewith to fill our chalices in honor of Barran-Sathanas, our Lord and Master. *Aie,* 'twas sweet to hear the helpless little ones plead for mercy as we bound them on the iron grille before the sanctuary, and sweeter still to hear their strangled moans as Henriet and I, or sometimes the great Gilles de Retz himself, passed the keen-edged knife across their upturned throats; but sweetest of all it was to quaff the beakers of fresh lifeblood, still warm from their veins and toss their quivering hearts into the brazier which burned so brightly before the throne of Barran-Sathanas!"

De Grandin's small, white teeth were chattering, but he forced another question:

"Accursed of heaven, when came your career to an end? Speak, by the powers that bind you, I command it!"

"In 1440," the answer came falteringly. "'Twas then Pierre de l'Hôpital came to Nantes with his power of men-at-arms and took us into custody. *Aie,* but the mean little folk who never dared look us in the face before flocked to the courtroom to testify how we had ravished away their brats from the cradle and sometimes from the breast, and made them sacrifices to our Lord and Master, the Prince of Evil!

"Our doom was sealed or ever we stood before the bench of justice, and in all the crowded hall there was none to look on me with pity save only Lizette, the notary's daughter, whom I had taken to the castle and initiated into our mysteries and taught to love the 'red milk' even as I did.

"Five days our trial lasted, and *À mort*—to death,' the court condemned us.

"They bore us to the meadow of Bisse, beyond the gates of Nantes, and hanged us by the neck. Henriet turned craven at the end, and made his sniveling peace with God, but the Sire De Retz and I stood stedfast to our master, Barran-Sathanas, and our souls went forth unshriven and unrepentant.

"My soul was earthbound, and for weeks I haunted the scenes I knew in life. The fourth month from my execution a butcher died, and as his spirit left his body I found that I could enter in. That very night, as his corpse awaited burial I draped it round me as a man may don a cloak, and went to Rouen, where later I was joined by my light o' love, Lizette. We lived there twenty years, haunting cabarets, filching purses, cutting throats when money was not otherwise to be obtained.

"At length Lizette died, and I was left alone, and though I knew her spirit hovered near me, I could not teach her how to find the flesh to clothe herself. When my second body died, I entered into the cadaver of a headsman, and plied my trade of blood for nearly thirty years, yet always did I seek some way to seize a body for Lizette. The learning I absorbed with Gilles de Retz I added to by going to the East and studying under masters of black magic, but though I nearly succeeded several times, there was always something missing from the charm which was to open the gates to my love-light's spirit into human flesh.

"Ten years ago, in Northern Africa, I came upon the missing words of the incantation, and practised it successfully, but only to have my triumph ravished from me, for the body we used was so weakened by disease that it could not stand the strains we put upon it, and once again Lizette's spirit was discarnate.

"In this city I have searched the homes of the dying in quest of a body suitable to our purposes, and found one when Vivian Sattalea gave up her fleshly garb two weeks ago.

"*Aie,* what pleasures we have known, once more treading the good green earth together. What sins we have committed, what joy we took in torturing the brat the cuckold husband sired and thought my Lizette still mothered! In the dead of night we have broken into churches, defiled the holy elements and——"

"Enough—*parbleu,* too much!" de Grandin shouted. "Pontou, condemned of man, accursed of God, rejected by that very Devil to whom of old you bowed the knee, I charge and enjoin you, by the might, power and majesty of that God whom you have so dishonored, depart hence from this earthly body you have stolen, and enter not into flesh again. And you, Lizette, wanton mistress of a villainous paramour, depart you likewise to that place where spirits such as yours

abide, and trouble not the living or the dead again with your uncleanly presence. Begone! *In nomine Domini,* be off, and come not hither any more again!"

As he concluded there sounded a dual groan from the bodies stretched before us on the floor, and from the left breast of the man and from the woman's left bosom there rose what looked like little jets of slowly escaping steam. The twin columns rose slowly, steadily, spreading out and thinning like vapor from a kettle-spout coming in contact with cold air, and as they swirled and twisted they merged and coalesced and clung together for an instant. Then the hovering, indistinct shape in the corner seemed suddenly to swoop downward, enveloped them in its ghostly folds as a drooping cloth might have done, and a soft, swishing noise sounded, as of a gentle wind soughing through bare tree-limbs. That was all. The candle lights winged out as if an extinguisher had pressed on them, and the warm, sultry air of August replaced the frigid cold which had chilled us to the marrow.

"It is finished—all is done," de Grandin's matter-of-fact announcement sounded through the darkness. "Will you be good enough to examine Madame Sattalea, Friend Trowbridge?"

I knelt beside the woman as he snapped on the lights, putting my fingers to her wrist. "Why," I exclaimed in bewilderment, "she's dead, de Grandin!"

"*Précisément,*" he agreed with an almost casual nod, "and has been since that evening two weeks ago when you and I pronounced her so. It was but the spirit of the wicked Lizette which animated and defiled her poor, dead flesh. If you will be so good as to sign a certificate of death, I shall prepare for the disposal of this ——" he touched the body of the man disdainfully with the polished toe of his dress shoe.

"*Monsieur,*" he turned to Sattalea, a look of sympathy on his face, "it were best that you said farewell to *Madame,* your wife, quickly. I go to call Monsieur Martin and bespeak his professional services for her."

"Oh, Vivian, Vivian," young Sattalea sobbed, dropping to his knees and pressing his lips to his wife's lifeless mouth, "if only I could forget these last two weeks—if only I hadn't let him desecrate your dead body with that——"

"*Monsieur* — attention — look at me!" de Grandin cried sharply.

For a moment he stared fixedly into Sattalea's eyes, then slowly put his hands to the other's forehead, stroked his brow gently, and:

"You will forget all that is past—you will not remember your wife's seeming interval of life since the night Friend Trowbridge and I pronounced her dead. Your wife has died of heat-stroke, we have attempted to save her, and have failed—there has been no invasion of her flesh by foul things from beyond, you have no recollection of Pontou, or of anything he has said or done—do you understand? Sleep, now, and awaken in half an hour, not sooner."

A dazed look in Sattalea's eyes and a faint, almost imperceptible nod of his head was the only answer.

"*Très bon!*" de Grandin exclaimed. "Quick, Friend Trowbridge, help me place her on the bed. She must not be found thus when he awakens!"

Working with feverish haste, we clothed the dead man's body in his black garments, bundled him into the tonneau of my car and drove slowly toward the river. At a darkened highway bridge we halted, and after looking about to make sure we were not observed, dropped the corpse into the dark waters. "Tomorrow or next day the police will find him," de Grandin remarked. "Identification will not be difficult, for the young McCrea will

testify of his visit to Monsieur Martin's and his attempt to buy a corpse —the coroner's jury will decide a harmless lunatic fell overboard while wandering through the town and came to his death by misadventure. Yes. It is much better so."

"But see here," I demanded as we turned homeward, "what was all that rigmarole that dead man told us? It isn't possible such a monster as that Gilles de Retz ever lived, or——"

"It is unfortunately all too true," de Grandin interrupted. "The judicial archives of the ancient Duchy of Brittany bear witness of the arrest, trial and execution of one of the greatest nobles of France, Gilles de Laval, Sire de Retz and marshal of the King's armies, at a specially convoked ecclesiastical court at Nantes in 1440. Together with two servants, Pontou and Henriet, he was hanged and burned for murder of more than a hundred little children and young girls, and for indisputably proven sorcery and devil-worship. Yes.

"As for the possibility of Pontou's spirit being earthbound, it is quite in line with what we know of evilly disposed souls. By reason of his intense wickedness and his vicious habits, he could not leave the earthly atmosphere, but must perforce hover about the sort of scenes which had pleased him in life. You remember how he was in turn a robber and a public executioner? Good.

"When we were called to attend Madame Sattalea and this so villainous Pontou first appeared on the scene, I was greatly puzzled. The magical formula he mouthed above the corpse of the poor dead lady I could not understand, for he spoke too quickly, but certain words I recognized, and knew them for the sign-words by which the necromancers of old called back the spirits of the dead. That was my first clue to how matters stood.

"When Monsieur McCrea told us of Pontou's attempt to buy a corpse, and the good *curè's* story of his effort to force entrance to a house of death coincided, I knew this evil man must have some special reason for desiring the body of a woman, and a woman only.

"When we met the little lad and went to Monsieur Sattalea's and there beheld the love scene between his wife and the evil black-clothed one, I was certain he had called the evil spirit of some woman long dead to inhabit the body of poor Madame Vivian that he might have companionship of his own wicked kind, and when she called him by name—Pontou—I did remember at once that the evilest of the servants of that blasphemous monster, Gilles de Retz had been so named, and realized something like the story confessed to us tonight might have happened.

"Therefore, I made my plans. The air about us is filled with all sorts of invisible beings, my friend. Some are good, some are very evil indeed, and some are neither one nor the other. Wise old King Solomon was given dominion over them as one of the few mortals who could be trusted not to abuse so great a power. To marshal them to his assistance he did devise certain cabalistic words, and he who knows the ancient Hebrew formulæ can call the invisible ones into visibility, but the risk is great, for the evil ones may come with those who are good, and work great injury. Nevertheless, I determined to make the experiment. By calling aloud the words of Solomon's incantations I provided us with strong spiritual allies, which should force the rebellious spirit of Pontou to speak, whether he willed it or not. Too, when I had so bound Pontou's spirit to answer my inquiries, I had him at a disadvantage —I could also call it forth from the body it had usurped. And once it was clear of that body the ghostly allies I had summoned made short work of it."

"But that dreadful, half-seen thing

(Continued on page 428)

A Bizarre Little Story Is This

The Echoing-Point

By KIRK MEADOWCROFT

IT WAS near the close of my last year at college, and this night I had worked later than usual in the chemical laboratory to put my notes in shape for the professor to examine the following day. Only the one light over my desk was burning, and the janitor, waiting to close the hall for the night, stood at the door. Finally he shuffled over beside me, and I expected that he was about to ask me to leave, but he only said:

"Ye would search out the secrets of the universe, would ye? Like all the rest of them. If ye were but wiser, ye'd live days and dream nights in terror lest ye find out what the universe holds."

I put aside my note-book to listen to this grizzled old man, who leaned on his broom and talked with the accent of the English countryside, so different from the speech of the Englishmen one commonly meets. Two generations of professors had studied, lectured, and died, since he had been the guardian of the hall, and he had seen much, with the quiet, unhurried watchfulness of the unlettered man. Disregarding the rules of the building, I lighted a cigarette.

"Ye'll not be one to tell if I smoke my pipe, then," said he. "And as to knowing too much—have ye read the ancients? Stupids among them same as we; but others—every line of their books is fair quivering with what they knew, and dared not tell. They knew as well, and more, as the country lads that spent a night in the Green Hill."

There rose perversely in my mind a picture of pudgy old Professor Winterbottom, who was the author of some thirty volumes, large and small, on chemical theory and who looked like a successful stockbroker, interviewing the Unknown and Unbelievable.

"Nay," said the janitor, reading my thoughts, "he knows nowt but his work—he would see nowt. Did his own house stand on its head instead of its toes he would step in by the window and never heed."

Then, as the thought of one thing will often call to mind its opposite, my thoughts turned to the story of Professor Hazlitt, as I had heard it from my father, who had been a student at this same college at the time when that brilliant young teacher had so suddenly and so strangely broken down in the midst of his success, and disappeared into a private asylum, hopelessly mad.

"Did you know Hazlitt?" I asked.

"Hazlitt? Who told ye of Hazlitt?"

"My father," I answered, "who studied here before me."

"Aye, it would be more than twenty years since. Hazlitt—he saw the universe, and he went out by the little door and no one saw him after." He puffed his pipe vigorously for a moment. "Happens I know what he saw, for I was with him. 'Twere no manner of use to tell them, then.

"It was in the year that he was made a full professor of physics, and the boys were coming to his courses in flocks, for he always had a keen way of lecturing that the boys liked.

He began to work late, nights, in his office here; this very room was his study, ye may not know. He was writing a paper on the *Physical Properties of Polydimensional Space.* I mind the name of it well, for I have the paper at home. When the president — old MacDonald it was then — came here to look over the poor man's papers, he saw that one on the desk. 'Pfoo,' he said, puffing out his cheeks, ' 'tis the work of a poor mad brain. Ye'll burn this rubbish, janitor.' But I kept it instead, for I was younger then, and there were times I thought the president an old fool.

"Along in December came from England a man that Hazlitt had known before. He came every day to the study, and they talked late together. I would hear them as I swept out the room, for Hazlitt was a thinking man, and would not willingly delay me in my work. The man from England had been in some society for finding ghosts and spirits, but they had put him out, as I understood it. I remember his saying: 'They wanted only gentle spirits that they could ask to rap on the tables in the parlor and read numbers in a hat. I showed them what I could, and after the last meeting the chairman came—trembling all over, he was—and said in his squeaking voice: "You—you had best resign, Mr. Thomas. We had a fancy to table-tipping, but it is devils and the sight of hell that you have brought." And he looked over his shoulder as though he feared what stood behind him. And devils and the sight of hell it likely was, for I could only show them what I had found,' said the man from England."

The janitor fumbled for a match and relit his pipe.

"And all the time Hazlitt only sat there in his chair and drummed with his fingers—wonderful thin fingers he had—and said, 'That is so,' or 'I have never seen that.'

"One night I asked him what it all meant, though it was seldom that I troubled him with questioning, and he told me. 'It is to find a place that we can't go to,' said he. 'Is it a place in this world?' I asks. 'No,' said he, 'it's not.' He said it was like the other side of the mirror: here, and yet not here. And he said that in that world a man could go nowhere, but that he must wait for the place to come to him. 'Can you believe that?' said he. 'Believe nowt, learn nowt,' said I, but I saw little then of what he meant. Still, I asked him if the place would come. 'Thomas says that it will,' he answered me, and then he went out.

"A few nights after, they were talking, and I heard Thomas give a great gasp, like a man choking. 'It's here,' he said; 'it's here.'

"They both listened, and I left off my sweeping to listen too. It was like the voices of people going by in a car, but there was no car and their voices were in the room, and they were crying. One little voice began to sing, and Hazlitt leaned forward in his chair and his eyes were awful. 'It's Anne, Anne, Anne!' he kept saying. The song went off into a scream and he fell over on the desk, with his hands pawing the papers and his heels kicking the chair, like a man in a fit. The noises grew farther and farther off, and it was Thomas and I that got him into a cab and took him home.

"I asked Thomas what it was that had come into the room. He asked me if I had ever been in a whispering gallery, where you stand in certain places and hear the voice of someone that ye can't see. He may be close by, just around the corner, or far off —ye can't tell. But he said that this was like a whispering gallery as big as the whole world and the sun and the stars—ye could see nowt, only hear."

The janitor knocked out his pipe on the floor and started to refill it, when we heard steps in the hall outside. He stuffed the pipe into his pocket. "It's

the new night watchman, and sweeping not done yet." Quickly he began to brush over the floor, while I gathered up my papers from the desk and stood ready to leave as the door opened.

THE man who entered was not the night watchman, but a tall, lean man with deep lines in his smooth-shaven face, who said, "Good evening, Tim," to the janitor in a voice that made the old man look up with a start.

"Good evening, Professor," he answered, and his hands shook till the broom-handle rattled against the desk.

The professor looked at me with some surprize, then called me by my father's name. A moment afterward he became abstracted, repeating to himself in a low voice: "There is another way." He kept moving his hands, and I noticed the slim fingers, gray and pale like all the rest of him. Some design seemed to be in his mind; then he noticed us again and said: "You can neither help nor hinder. Only come over near me and stand without moving." We had no power to disobey that voice.

We watched him without even wondering as he took handfuls of earth from his pocket and sprinkled them carefully in a figure that enclosed us all. By that, the old janitor knew what he was about to do, and he told me in whispers: "It be black magic—to draw the other world to this same place again. There has been those could do it, in times past." But he grew uneasy. Once he spoke aloud: "Ye will lose your soul, sir."

"What need have I of a soul?" asked Hazlitt, and the janitor made no answer.

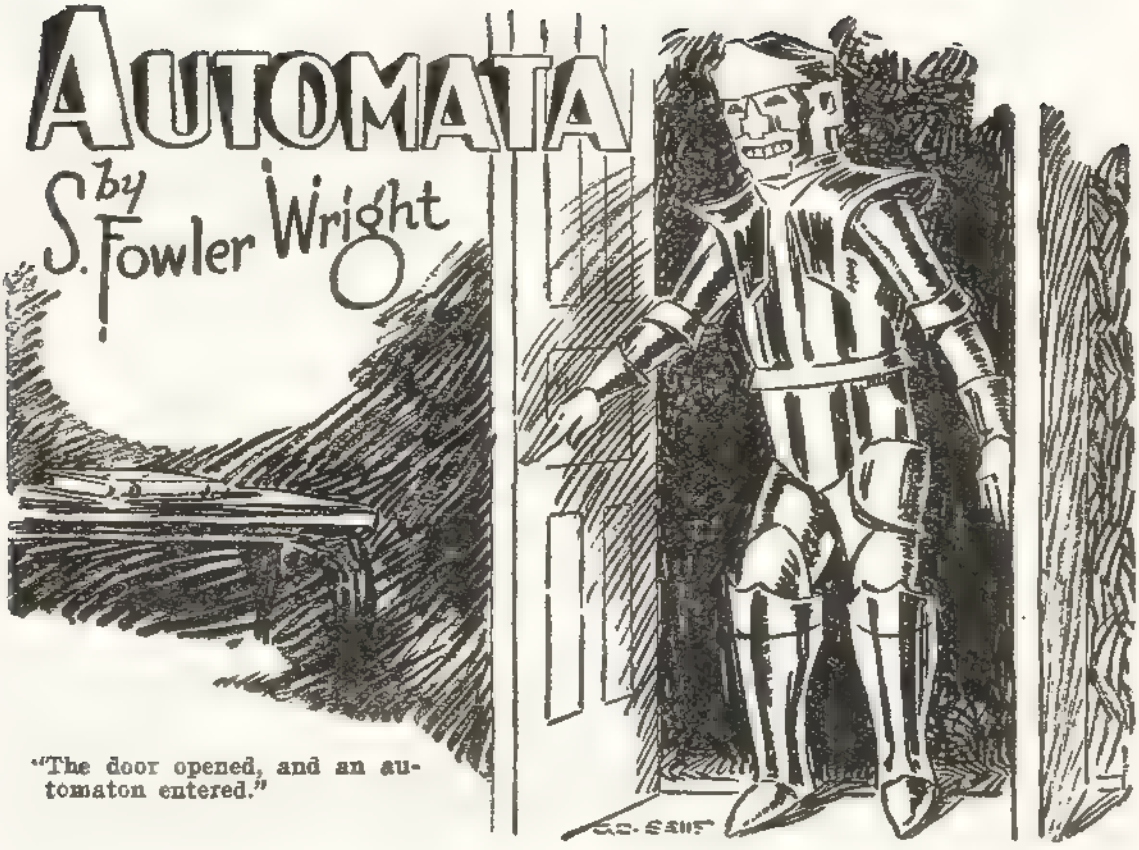
"Not to draw the figure, but to project it; not to draw, but to project," whispered the gaunt man to himself, as over and over he crossed and interlaced the lines. When it was finished, he stood waiting, but his knees shook, and, gently as we could, we helped him kneel. Outside, the sound of the wind sweeping over the roof rose louder and louder. And it may have been more than the wind, for as it came rushing on, Hazlitt started up, but his foot slipped and he fell, half over the border of the twisted lines. He lay without moving, and the wind passed on.

The old janitor knelt at his side for a moment, and then, going back to his broom, began very carefully to sweep up all traces of the sprinkled earth. Once he paused to look at me and say: " 'Twere his heart. There be no need to say owt else."

And it was thus that we reported it.

AUTOMATA

by S. Fowler Wright



"The door opened, and an automaton entered."

THE annual meeting of the British Association was being held at Sheffield, and the learned members were assembled to hear the presidential address of Dr. Tilwin, who had shaken the foundations of scientific complacency at the Brighton gathering of the previous year, by a casual allusion to "the two obvious fallacies in the theory of relativity."

He was too eminent a mathematician to be disregarded and the scientific world had waited impatiently for a justification of that audacious challenge, which had appeared only a few weeks earlier, and concerning which none of the nine persons in England who professed (rightly or not) to understand the assaulted theory had yet ventured an opinion.

Now it was hoped that the new president would use the occasion for a further elucidation of the startling heresy which he had put forward. Were they to be persuaded back to the childish levels of Newton, or led to unimagined heights of mathematical complexity?

Even the popular belief that two and two make four might not be left unchallenged. All that is certainly known is that they have done so very frequently. The rule is not therefore proved to be invariable, nor, could it be shown that it has been so in the past, would it be a logical consequence that it must be always so in the future.

But Dr. Tilwin made no further assault upon Einstein's incomprehensible stronghold.

He commenced, instead, to direct the attention of his audience to the results of modern scientific discoveries as they had materialized themselves in the changed conditions of human life, and then, more specifically, as

they had developed the instruments of production and labor, first substituting inorganic for organic sources of energy, and then inorganic for organic media for its practical implement.

The assembly listened at first with a somewhat tepid interest. They understood that the age of machinery was being eulogized, as an almost necessary compliment to the occupations of the city in which they met, and they expected that the address would pass on to other more disputable or fruitful fields, but they stirred themselves with a quickened observation as their president continued to develop the topic he had commenced, and to conduct it, with unemotional logic, to its somber end.

"The earlier inventors of mechanical apparatus," he was now saying, "asserted confidently that their advantages to mankind would result in an increase of population, and this fallacy was supported for a time by the fact that large numbers were enabled to congregate in centers around which there was no sufficient area of fertile land to feed them.

"Yet, even then, the writing was on the wall. Around these urban areas stretched mile after mile of green countryside on which a healthy peasantry shrank and dwindled as the powers of steam and petrol were substituted for that of human muscles. Gone were the merry crowds of the English hayfields, and the dead hands that had wielded the harvest-sickle had no descendants.

"When it was found that the few who were left could not, under the new conditions, grow the food which was their only merchandise, in successful competition with the supplies of distant lands, their countrymen were indifferent. Let them starve or cease. War brought famine, and there was a short-lived reaction. Then the spectacle of a race destroying its most virile elements for a delusion of profit was resumed and the declension continued.

"It is true that the rapid disappearance of the horse was observed as a direct consequence of the substitution of inorganic for organic energy, but its significance was disregarded.

"Even today, there may be few of us who have realized that it is not the horse alone which is destined to disappear before the advance of a higher energistic form, that we ourselves in a few generations—probably in a very few generations—are destined to follow. . . . Yet the process of our destruction has commenced already.

"It is true that fears have been expressed lest the advance of knowledge should provide us with explosive substances, with bacterial cultures, or vaporous poisons, by which we might contrive our own annihilation. But it is difficult to suppose that an overruling Providence would permit our disappearance before we have fulfilled the high destiny of our evolution, and have occupied the earth with such a race of automata as will continue to function and to develop,—to what ends we can only dimly imagine,—without the need of our continued service.

" . . . I have said that the process of our destruction has commenced already. Already Nature, working in her kindly, gradual ways, is preparing us to face not individual, but racial extinction without excessive protest, or too-keen regret. The old ideal of the home is fading. The old superstition of the value or necessity of children is leaving, if it have not already left, our minds.

"Our fathers thought no shame to let the plow-horse die, finding that the power of steam could be successfully substituted for a creature which had the pains and pleasures, the impulses and imperfections, of a sentient life. Our children think no shame to say that they will have a child less that they may have an auto-car the more.

Some of the machines that we have designed already are employed in manufacturing appliances to frustrate the natural fertility of the race.

"The day of the substitution of the machine for the human body is not a vision of the future, a speculation of the philosopher. It is already upon us.

" . . . It is the control of motion which has first betrayed us. We constructed machines which would move our possessions. Then our machines commenced to manufacture others which were adapted to move ourselves. The population of the machines has increased until they can be counted in millions; we are content to climb into them, and to be moved backwards and forwards continually, as gnats whirl in the sun.

" . . . But, as yet, we may observe with some satisfaction that they are dependent upon our service. They can not move unless we put the food into their bellies, and we can stop or turn them with a motion of our hand.

"Yet how long can this balance of power continue? How long shall we be able to observe this pause of uncertainty, during which it may be hard to say whether the man exists for the machine, or the machine for the man?

"Already the tide is on the turn.

"It is not only that the automata have been constructed which in clumsy, limited ways can perform some human actions, or produce some vocal sounds.

"It is more significant that the number of men who are employed in every factory decreases as its machines become more numerous.

"The capstan lathe may require a workman's individual attention. The automatic lathe is capable of a great variety of independent operations, and a team of these, industriously occupied, may be content with the menial service of a single attendant.

"The humility of science will hesitate to prophesy the detailed incidence of that which may be seen in its inevitable outline, but it may not be a too-rash guess that the industrial workman and the domestic servant will be the first to disappear from their places in the national life. Some few may remain for generations, even for centuries. But is it reasonable to suppose that the nation will continue altruistically to support the persons and families of industrial workers who are no longer needed? For themselves, there may be some generous provision to avert the euthanasia which would be the evident economic expedient for the aged horse, or the dog of which a woman has grown tired, but would it be tolerable that we should allow the propagation of their useless children?

"Or consider, how many would there be who would continue the employment of the domestic servant, idle, wasteful, dirty and unreliable as they too often are, merely that the population might not diminish, when there would be automatic substitutes available, which would not only be free from such faults, but would require no "evenings out", no annual increase of wages, and could be put away if the house were closed, without requiring the continued supply of food or fuel?" . . .

At this point Sir Ireton Mount looked at the illustrious author of Sheerluck Soames, who was seated beside him. They shook their massive heads in a troubled wonder. Their colossal intellects told them that such developments were logical enough. But why had the spirits given no hint to their faithful servants? They went out to consult Pheneas.

2

BELLORINA was a woman of a weak sentimentality, which had caused her to expand the free allotment of seventeen units of energy, which was the maturity-portion which every woman of the community was entitled to claim on allocation, in the erection

of a personal home, modeled on the expiring traditions of the aborigines of the Twentieth Century. It was built of oblong red bricks, with a tiled and sloping roof. Its rooms were of irregular sizes, and were disfigured by many ingle-nooks, "exposed" oak beams, and the remains of a bread-oven. It had a feeding-table, and quaint crockery utensils, instead of the usual nutrition-pumps. Even the automata which waited upon her were of the oldest patterns, finished in imitation of the living maid-servants of that remote period to which her mind reverted. The outside of the house was patched with flowers and shorn grass, and groups of senseless and insanitary trees. Appropriately enough, after what she knew to be the way of the ultra-esthetic Georgians, she had called it Daisy Villa.

Today, Bellorina had invited three female acquaintances, who, like herself, were not on the mating-list of the week, to join her at an "afternoon tea" so that the illusion of savagery might be completely realized.

They were all allocated women, with a full knowledge of life, and sure to talk freely and scandalously when they got together.

Bora-Ann came a few minutes before the others, as the dignity of her suffix required, and waited without complaint when the door (which should have opened in response to the secret word of invitation in F sharp) remained closed till she pressed the push, and an automaton, dressed in black with a white apron and cap, had promptly responded.

She did not falter in her courteous approbation, even when a child, with the appearance of a girl of five or six years, met her in the hall, and held out a timid hand, saying, "Good afternoon, Mrs. Bora-Ann," in a gay Georgian voice. She did not know what the "Mrs." meant, for the folly of studying past history was no longer general, but she understood that this was the sort of thing which was supposed to happen in the old barbarous days, and she stooped good-humoredly for the small lifted arms to go round her neck, and kissed the soft cheek kindly.

The queer little room was windowed, but a loggia reduced its light, and an obsolete electric bulb glowed from the ceiling, for it was winter twilight without. The corners of the room were in shadow, and Bora-Ann, who had never known an actual darkness, controlled her fear with some difficulty, as she fitted herself, with commendable agility, into the wicker-chair which her hostess indicated for her reception.

"How sweet everything is!" she said kindly; "it was almost like a real flesh-child in the hall. . . . " Then her voice changed to a half-fearful excited note, as the thought came, *"It wasn't a real flesh-child, was it?"*

The question remained unanswered for a moment, for Mira and Scarletta came in together, and chairs had to be drawn out, and their uses indicated; then Bellorina answered, with a laugh which was not free from embarrassment, "Oh, no; I'm not quite so mad as that. . . . Not in the hall, anyway. You couldn't tell what would happen. . . . But it's a very good imitation. I've got two, really. They can say almost anything, and are never seriously disobedient. They oil themselves, and charge each other's batteries at bedtime. They're really no trouble at all."

"I was speaking to someone yesterday," said Mira, who was always indefinite as to her sources of information, "who told me that the man she had last week told her that he had had a woman the week before who told him that she knew a woman,—I can't be sure, but I believe it's that blue-banded scratchcat at Pity Rise. It couldn't be anyone else in our country. They say she's so coarse that she had the same man twice in one year when the lists were altered,—I told Biltie last night that I'm sure it's

she, and Biltie told Agra-Ann this morning that he knows it for a fact,—who had a flesh-child five years ago, and the woman said she believes it's still there."

"I daresay it's true enough," said Scarletta, hopefully. "They say that flesh-children are almost common in some parts of Italy. I don't think that anyone has more than one, and, of course, they have two or three automata for them to play with. But it's an endless trouble to all concerned. Flesh-children are dirty things, and they won't keep the same size, and sometimes they die altogether. They say you can't imagine what has to be done for them the first year or so, to keep them going at all. I suppose there have to be a few somewhere, but it's hard to think that a decent woman should have one."

"It isn't only the coarseness of it," Mira answered. "It's difficult to understand any woman being so silly. The automata make each other so well now, that there's no excuse for anyone messing with a flesh-child. Since the mathematicians perfected the law of the Automatic Balance of Deviation——"

"I don't understand mathematics," her hostess interposed, "and I know Scarletta hates them. Of course, Bora-Ann"—she smiled deferentially at the woman whose suffix placed her among the intellectual aristocracy of her time—"but there isn't any real need for us humans to worry about such things now, is there? Sartie told me that the automata can work out problems that no man could possibly even attempt. He says it's because they're not distracted with feelings and jealousies, and help each other instead of quarreling. And they don't get tired, and make mistakes. Sartie says we shan't be needed much longer, even to make them. . . . Of course, evolution's right enough, and I know I'm silly, but it all seems rather dreadful to me. I wish I'd got a body that lasts, or could have a new valve when the old one wears out. And—I know you'll laugh at me, but I almost wish I'd got a flesh-child, or even two. The automata are both very sweet and loving, and they're no trouble at all, but it must be rather fun to watch them change as they grow,—and—to comfort them when they cry."

Bora-Ann moved uneasily. She was a guest, and she would be sorry to hear anything which might involve report and repression. She resisted an inclination to change the subject. She felt that it would be cowardly to do so. Such a position should be handled kindly, but firmly.

"I don't think," she answered, "that you quite realize what you say. The unhealthy atmosphere in which we are sitting may go far to explain it. But you are right that the automata can solve problems which are far beyond the capacity of the human mind, and some of the newest are so constructed that they can themselves design any machine which is needed to carry out their own conceptions. . . . There is a difference between the greatest man and the simplest machine which can never be bridged, and our highest wisdom is to observe it with reverence and humility. It is not a difference in degree, but in kind. We act from confused and contradictory impulses, but they act with the inevitability of universal law. In a word, we are human, and they are divine."

She made the sacred sign as she said it, and observed with satisfaction that the hand of her hostess was lifted also. It was, at least, no house of open blasphemy into which she had entered. . . . But she resolved that a suggestion which she had intended to make should remain unspoken. It had been calculated that twenty human attendants would be required by their masters for certain menial offices in the next generation, for which provision had not yet been made, and she had been commissioned to obtain

twenty women volunteers to produce them. She had thought of Bellorina at once as one who would be less likely than most of her acquaintances to resent the indignity of such a proposal. But she was a woman of religious mind, and she saw that Bellorina was morally unfit for such a motherhood. She turned the subject adroitly by remarking that the Bliskie trial would commence on Tuesday.

"I don't believe he did it on purpose," Scarletta started at once. "I think it's a shame to try him. I know I should make mistakes continually."

"It was bad enough for Corinna, anyway," said Mira; "you can't expect her not to complain. If you were put into the wrong operating-machine, and found you'd left half your thyroid behind when you only wanted a cancer taken out of your liver——"

"Well, he says he forgot the numbers of the machine for a moment. He'd never made a mistake before in over twenty years," Scarletta persisted.

"But you know they say that he'd quarreled with Corinna the week before, and she said she knew he'd play her some trick before she entered," Bellorina felt it only fair to remind her.

"It all shows the importance of eliminating the human element," said Bora-Ann, who saw it to be a lesson which her companions needed. "A machine is not merely incapable of a spiteful action, it is so far above it that the very suspicion would be an absurdity; nor could it make such a mistake as the man suggests in his own defense,—if such it can be called. To my mind it condemns him more utterly than if he admitted the accusation. But I believe that a proper automaton is already being designed to replace him, so that we need have no fear for ourselves in future."

Bellorina sighed silently. She knew that it was wrong to doubt, and she was really sorry for the misadventure of Corinna's thyroid. She realized the defects of her race. If only she had the intellect of Bora-Ann, no doubt it would be easier to believe. . . . After all, she had the prettiest hair in the Thames valley, or so Gartie had told her. . . . And Gartie would be hers for a week from next Tuesday. . . . In the end, what matters?

. . . She became aware that her thoughts had wandered, and her guests were rising. "Must you really go?" she was saying.

It may be that nothing does.

3

THE last—the nameless last—of a dying race, the man sat before his drawing-board, idly fingering his compasses, forgetful of the uncompleted task which the overseer had set him, while his aging mind went backward.

He might be the last of his kind . . . he knew that it was a sign of weakness to regret it. The fact that his mind was wandering now was a sign of his inferiority to the busy mechanisms around him. His mind was lawless and unstable in a universe in which law and order were supreme and final.

There were some men who had seen this, even in the crude beginnings of the age of machinery. They had taught that everything is controlled at last by Natural Laws which are both blind and inflexible.

Men had foolishly imagined an ultimate supremacy of their own blundering bodies;—even, in their incredible egotism, they had postulated an anthropomorphic God.

Yet, in a universe where law and order rule, the precision of the machine—even of the earliest and crudest constructions — must have been superior — in greater harmony with their environment—than were bodies so clumsily constructed that they can not be trusted to repeat the simplest operations with exactitude of time or movement. Bodies easy to break, difficult to control or repair.

Dimly they had seen, even then, in a universe which is itself a machine, working by mathematical, unchanging law, the absurdity of an emotional anthropomorphic God.

Yet they had not seen far ahead, at the first.

The steam-plow came, and the petrol-drawn car, and the horse died out to make place for these mechanisms. Few men had realized that the doom of their own race was logically foreshadowed, and that nothing could save them but a war sufficiently disastrous to destroy the world's machinery and the conditions which could produce it.

But such wars as came had only resulted in the subjection of the backward tribes who had not learnt the new worship. The industrial worker had disappeared before the pressure of economic law; the domestic servant before the dictates of fashion.

Even in the earliest days the new worship had been established, although it was not then recognized that a new and higher faith had superseded the old superstitions. When the new Moloch called for blood-sacrifice it had been paid without protest or regret, though it would not have been easily satisfied. It sucked blood very greedily, not of single sacrifices as on the Hittite altars of old, but the blood of thousands. When it was thought (in error) that a system of one-way traffic might be conducive to its speed and comfort, the blood of an extra hundred of Londoners had not been grudged to the trial, though their deaths had been foreseen and forecalculated.

Ships had already been manipulated without crews, and airplanes controlled without pilots, and where the helmsmen had gone the chauffeur had very quickly followed.

Of course there had been anger—protest — rebellion. There had been populations, particularly in some of the old urban areas, that had persisted in the production of useless insanitary children. But such revolts had been futile. The machines had been invincible, and the men who fought beside them had shared their triumph. Even those early machines, directed and controlled by the men who made them, had been irresistible. They had not cried out when they were hurt, they had not slept when on duty. They belonged to a higher natural order than mankind.

. . . Soon it would be a world of machines from which the memory of mankind had died. He did not know that he was the last man living. How should he? But he knew that the last of human births was behind him.

A world of machines—to his feeble, futile brain it seemed lacking in purpose. Yet he knew, as his ancestors had perceived, that the universe is without consciousness. Scientists had realized, even then, that sentient life is a sporadic outbreak, which, if it have ever occurred, or will do so, elsewhere is almost incredibly remote and occasional, a mere outbreak of cheese-mites, a speck of irritation, a moment's skin-disease on the healthy body of a universe of never-changing law.

. . . He remembered the Crawlers. They had been no larger than a man. Their smooth skins had been impenetrable to anything less than a high-explosive shell. Their mandibles were a 20 H. P. vise, yet so softly padded, so gradual in operation, that they could be trusted to strangle the throat they seized without breaking the skin, and to loose it when pulsation ceased, and they fulfilled their purpose. A dozen of these let loose in the rebellious slums had soon checked their foolish fecundity. Then there had been—but his mind turned from the thought. They had been rather horrible in their operations;—but effectual, as machines are.

The hypnotic method by which the Eastern races had been led to destroy themselves to the accompaniment of their own laughter had been a pleasanter thing to watch.

Deus ex machina,—the human race has always had a subconscious knowledge of its own deficiency. It was shown in their clumsy efforts at patterning: in their desire for repetitions of any kind: by the way in which they would snap and worry at anyone who deviated in word or garment: or in the stubborn continuation of a custom after need and meaning had left it.

But the time of rebellion had passed, and resignation had followed. Resignation,—and worship.

Worship had been gradual in its growth, but inevitable. Even in the early days of the Twentieth Century man had stood in silent adoration around the machines that had self-produced a newspaper or a needle. . . . And at that time they could no more have conceived what was to follow than the first ape that drew the sheltering branches together could foresee the dim magnificence of a cathedral dome. But even then they were displacing the anthropomorphic God, and preparing for the occupation of a vacant throne. . . .

He wakened guiltily from his wandering thoughts as the bell rang that announced the coming of the messenger that would collect the work of the day. . . . Only five of the six drawings were ready. He did not know what would follow. Would they scrap him in the consequence? He knew that he had been quite safe so long as he had been regular in his habits, and exact in his work.

It was all law now,—blind law. No emotion — no injustice: no caprice. Had the intricate evolutions of self-designing machinery provided for this unprecedented failure?

He became aware that the collector was standing beside him. It would not wait. Starting hurriedly, he dropped the folded sheets into the slot that opened to take them. One — two — three—four—five.

The collector paused for a moment longer, giving time enough for the sixth sheet to follow. A wild and impious thought leapt into the brain of the delinquent. Might he not drop a blank into the slot? When and how would the error be discovered? What a confusion would result? Had he done so, it may be that the tiny cause would have spread disaster and chaos in that ordered world, and it might have fallen in fragments, to be rebuilt by the patient forces of evolution through the succeeding eons. It is more probable that such a contingency had already been discounted by the inhuman powers which were at work around him. But had he been capable of such an action, he saw, even as he thought it, that it would be impossible. There was no time to fold the empty sheet before the automaton, after a second of human-seeming hesitation, had passed on, and was making its collection from the workers further along the bench.

He knew that he ought to move; he knew that the oiler would be here in a few minutes to caress and comfort the joints and bearings of his companions. Yet he sat still, wondering.

. . . The door opened, and an automaton entered. It was one of those which still bore a vague resemblance to humanity, the pattern of the first designers not having been entirely abandoned. It was thus that the human race might leave the impress of its passing flicker of life for a million years — perhaps for ever — as a mollusk may leave its fossil imprint in the enduring rock. It came quietly up to the nameless relic of the human race, and took his arm in a grip that was sufficient, but without violence.

He shuddered inwardly, remembering the fate of those who had rebelled in his early childhood, and who had been given in sacrifice by their fellowmen to the offended deities.

He remembered their screams as they had fallen among the machines that they had blasphemed so foolishly.

But he did not dream of rebellion. Evolution had triumphed. Side by side, they went out together.

Winged Vengeance

by B. Wallis

"Alice! Quick! Something to tie him up—curtains, anything!"

"THAT will keep you guessing," I called as I delivered one of my choice twisters.

But Jack Trent to my astonishment dropped his racket, and drawing his right hand to the level of his eyes stared minutely at it.

"Can't make it out, Haydon; must have twisted it. But I don't remember when. Stiff and sore as the deuce," he called to me.

"What's the matter? Sprained your wrist?" I queried doubtingly.

And as he did not reply, but stood frowning perplexedly, I leapt the net and went to him. He was looking pale and very serious, quite unlike his normal cheery self. A few moments before he had been dodging about his side of the tennis net more nimbly than one would credit a man of his rather fleshy build.

"This arm of mine was all right a few minutes ago, but now it aches like blazes!" he said slowly. "Look here! Queer, isn't it?" he added, thrusting it stiffly toward me; and I saw his lips purse as though with an unexpected throb of pain.

"By George! I should say it does look queer! What the devil have you been up to?" I exclaimed, astounded and alarmed. For his arm from fingers to the rolled shirt sleeve above his elbow looked as though it had been dyed a sickly shade of green, and the veins stood out in congested lines like thick cord. The whole arm was badly swollen — swelling rather, for as I stared, a little hollow in the crook of the arm filled out and stretched still further the tight-drawn skin.

"Here, come indoors! I'll phone for a doctor right away; I don't like the look of that—blood-poisoning of some kind! Can't you account for it

in any way?" As I spoke I slipped my arm through his uninjured one and urged him in the direction of the house, which lay about two hundred feet distant; this tennis lawn and a space of terraced flower garden and shrubbery intervening.

He seemed a little dazed and frightened, for he went willingly enough and uttered no word until we reached the boundary of the lawn. Then without warning he swayed and would have fallen had I not quickly caught him beneath the shoulders.

"I say! I feel bad. Let me rest on the grass a bit—may pass off. The pain is getting awful—makes me feel sick," he muttered, gasping.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, easing him gently to the turf, where he lay on his side with stiffly indrawn limbs. "What can it be, Trent? There wasn't a thing wrong with you a few minutes ago. Isn't there anything you can think of?" I queried anxiously.

"It started after that red fly bit me on the hand. Just a nip—couldn't be that," he replied jerkily, breathing heavily and staring at me dully.

"Red fly! Where?—what kind of a fly?" I asked.

"Red—all over. It bit me. Killed it — then this pain," he replied in gasps, and I could see the perspiration was standing in beads on his face.

At once I realized that he was too ill to move another step. But what was it? a seizure of some kind? This talk of a fly could only be the commencement of delirium. Certainly I had not noticed any such vivid-hued insect.

"Lie quiet here for a moment. I'll get some brandy—back in a second," I called to him as I made off at a run.

At top speed I dashed across the terraces; ignoring the footpaths and crashing heedlessly through the bushes and flowers.

The suddenness of the attack shocked and alarmed me exceedingly. I had for Trent a very strong liking; though he was only a few years my senior, yet his solidity of character was my secret envy, and his advice an unacknowledged anchor to my naturally impetuous temperament. This was the second day of our visit to Bob Norris, a mutual friend, and much blessed with the world's dross, and in spite of lately taking unto himself a wife—whose heart was as true and simple as his own—he had insisted upon his two old chums forsaking the barren silence of their modest offices in San Francisco and spending a few days at his new home on the waterfront some miles from Oakland. Business being quiet in our line—produce brokers—we simply left Norris' phone with our stenographer and gaily sallied forth.

Carefree as a couple of schoolboys Trent and I had sought the tennis court, leaving Norris lazily stretched in a long deck-chair, with his pipe and a book, in the sun-room which faced this way. With a bound I leapt the final low embankment, above which lay a broad gravel walk and the wide-open doors of the sun-room.

"Bob!" I called, as I dashed in; "Trent is taken ill. Get some——"

And then I stopped; speechless with amazement and horror. The chair was vacant, but Norris was still in the room. He lay in a crumpled heap on the floor close to the entrance of the billiard room which separated these two apartments from the main building.

"Bob! what is it?" I cried, hardly knowing what I said as I dropped on my knees beside him.

He lay on his side with his knees drawn stiffly forward—in a flash I saw Trent as I had left him—I raised his head from the thick matting. Death, an end of agony, stared at me from his sightless eyes, and from the set features marked with the grim stamp of acute physical suffering. His skin had the same horrible greenish yellow mottling—though much inten-

sified — which lay upon the swollen arm of the man I had just left.

What did it all mean? What could possibly have stricken the two men with a blow so swift and deadly! Whatever on earth was I to do? Norris lay stone-dead, and Trent, as I instinctively realized, was dying. How could I face the two women—Helen Norris and her girl friend Edith Maynard—and break the terrible news? Yet I must do it, and at once. Or had they been also stricken by this inexplicable horror? That I myself might be equally exposed to this malignant something did not at the moment alarm me. The need for instant action was imperative; I had no time to consider self, I must find these two without a second's delay.

"My God! what shall I do? where can they be?" I muttered hoarsely. Then I recollected that I had overheard Mrs. Norris remark that they had some correspondence to indite and would pass the afternoon in her private den. This, I knew, lay on the other side of the house and on the floor above.

As I rose to my feet there came a faint buzzing of rapidly whirring insect wings, and from the ground—I could not exactly say where—there shot humming up to me two odd-looking little flies. So insignificant were they—no larger than the average housefly—that I should never have noticed them but for their vivid scarlet hue. One lit on the cuff of my soft shirt—by some chance I had not bared my forearm—the other made a dash at my face. I slashed out at it; my hand swept the little insect to my shoulder and instantly transposed it into merely a dirty red stain on the white of the flannel. Its companion, disturbed by the concussion, shot off at a great pace and disappeared through the doorway.

"A red fly bit me—then this pain!" I started; the words rang in my ears almost as though Trent's living lips had called to me. Of course it was but the welling up of memory vitalized by the unique and intense color of my assailants, but for the moment I could have sworn that Trent had spoken the words. And they came to me now with a new and terrible significance. What could it mean? Were these tiny insects really the harbingers of sudden and awful death? They were such insignificant little things, though their vivid hue was certainly unique, so far as my limited entomological learning went. Yet there was the fact that two men apparently in the best of health had without a moment's warning been assailed by something incredibly venomous and malignant; and one of the victims had directly connected the insect with his condition, while my own eyes had witnessed their presence in the other case. However incredible, yet the evidence seemed irrefutable and I must work upon that hypothesis. This determination was reached as I raced through the rooms, across the hall, and took the stairs three at a time.

Luckily I recollected the position of the room Norris had so proudly exhibited to me as his wife's private den. I flung myself at the door, and without pausing to knock rushed in, quickly closing it behind me as my eyes swept the apartment. Miss Maynard was occupying a lounge-chair drawn close to the large, wide-open window; a faint breeze was languidly thrusting inward the frail lace curtains.

"Mr. Haydon!" she exclaimed, starting to her feet in wonder.

"Excuse me — sorry — that window!" I ejaculated disjointedly as I made a dash for it and slammed both sashes tight.

"Mr. Haydon! what are you doing?" she asked indignantly.

"Where is Mrs. Norris? I thought she was with you. Quick! don't waste a second — it's life and death!" I hurled back at her.

"Helen? — she went down to the garden for some flowers about ten

minutes ago. But what is the matter? —what has happened?" she queried anxiously, startled by my words.

"No time to explain—I don't know what to think! There's something terrible, deadly, about! I must find Mrs. Norris at once. Please do as I ask you: remain here with door and window shut until I return in a few minutes. Your life may depend on it!"

"Certainly I will do as you want me to. Can't I help? Won't you tell me what it is?"

My hand was on the door-handle as she spoke. Suddenly a thought came to me.

"Wait! if you see a red fly—a small thing—kill it at once; don't let it near you. No! I'm not mad," I disclaimed earnestly, even harshly, and not waiting for her reply I opened the door, rapidly slipped out and closed it instantly.

Down the stairs I tore, circled the large hall, slamming shut all open doors, and in a moment I was out in the grounds, which on this side of the building were for some space laid out in beds of exquisite flowers. Here were many winding walks, so arranged with small trees and shrubs that they afforded an artistic privacy. At random I sped down one of these paths which led toward the water—their property included a long stretch of waterfront — shouting as I went, "Mrs. Norris! Mrs. Norris!"

Not a sound save my own voice broke the repose of that golden afternoon. "Mrs. Norris! Mrs. Norris!" I shouted again and again. And at each pause the lonely silence of the place sent a thrill of nameless dread coursing through me; yet as though to buoy my courage a wave of anger swept alongside. Where had the servants got to? Surely someone should respond to my outcry! True, there were no more than four—a Japanese cook, a house-boy of his country, Mrs. Norris' maid, and a handy man who attended to the grounds and could drive a car when required. Save the maid, these had their quarters in a small wing beyond the kitchen. Surely there should be some audible evidence of their presence in the vicinity; yet though I stopped and listened not a sound broke the awful silence.

Abruptly my search came to an end. Close to the terraced waterfront, lying across the footpath with her head and shoulders smothered in a clump of fragrant jasmine shrubs, was Mrs. Norris. It needed not my frenzied rush to her side and the raising of the lovely head, piled high with its glory of deep auburn tresses, from its pillow of delicate blooms to sense the truth. Even before my horrified gaze had noted the strange and fearful disfigurement of mottled, discolored flesh I knew that this gentle soul had already followed poor Norris and had fallen a victim to the same fearfully malignant foe. And if further proof were necessary—to this moment I had not entirely accepted as proven that these minute winged things were truly the source of the awful happenings—from the crushed plants where her head had lain there arose a little flick of vivid color, a mere dot of deepest scarlet; an insignificant, save for its unique hue, insect, but, as I now realized beyond a doubt, carrying a venom of incredible menace to humanity. In savage terror I hit at the little thing, but it evaded me, and soaring high, vanished. Where could it have come from? I had never heard of such a virulent insect; and of all places, in this happy land of well ordered security! Yet it was impossible to doubt the fearful evidence: in each terrible tragedy one or more of these frightful little things had been, visibly or by evidence, in direct contact with the victim.

And now I awoke to the peril of my own position; in the open and unprotected I might at any second feel the trifling—it could be no more—sting and know that I too would in a few moments be lying silent forever. I had no desire to throw away my life;

and who could say how many others depended upon my instant warning? Without a second's delay I must get to the phone and in touch with those whose word would carry conviction. I could hardly imagine that this spot had been the sole point of attack by these hellish things; rather was it more probable that this was but the initial appearance of a most frightful inundation. Yet, life or death, I could not forsake this last poor victim. I might be signing my death warrant by the delay; no matter, I would do my best.

Reverently I lifted the still warm body and laid it across my shoulders in the simple manner taught by my first aid training. Fortunately, I am naturally muscular and of an active habit, so that the distance to the house —about three hundred yards—was no impossible task to traverse, laden though I was. My nerves were strung to an abnormal pitch to catch through eye or ear the faintest hint of those deadly insects.

I SHALL remember that returning to my last hour; the day was absolutely perfect, hot, but a gentle whisper of a breeze dulled its edge and afforded a suggestion of vitality to the beautiful solitude. As I reached the higher ground near the house I could faintly hear in rhythmic vibrance the sirens of the shipping on the bay, hinting at the bustling marts of mankind poor Trent and I had so joyously forsaken. The Norris home lay by the shore line of a little bay nearly ten miles south of Oakland, and in such seclusion that it afforded neither sight nor sound of this city or the great town across the water; and the estate consisting of over one hundred acres, the nearest neighbor lay almost half a mile away.

A somnolent peace brooded upon the spot; it seemed impossible that tragedy so horrible and irrevocable could be associated with an environment so lovely and apparently so innocent. As with my dreadful burden I made my way to the house, I asked myself in all sincerity, "Is this not some frightful dream? It can not be true! It's impossible! Trent, Norris, his wife, all dead! dear friends I was conversing with so pleasantly not an hour ago; Trent but a few moments back. My God! it's a dream, a terrible nightmare!" Yet my brain was racing a score of devious paths of urgent action; I must call a doctor, get in touch with the police and health officials, above all see to the safety of Miss Maynard.

My natural impulse was to return immediately to poor Trent, but I had not the least hope that he was alive. I knew now that when I had rushed for aid he was in reality even then at the point of death. My duty was clearly to the living. At every step it seemed to me I could distinguish the approach of those fearful little things; yet I reached the building untouched. Softly I laid my burden upon a settle—as I entered I had closed the door with a backward nudge of my elbow — immediately touched a button communicating with the offices of the servants, and spent the moment of waiting searchingly scanning the space for those devilish things.

A door opened at the far end of the hall and a tall, trim girl appeared.

"Did you ring, sir?" she asked.

"Yes—shut that door—I have something to tell you," said I quietly.

She looked at me in surprize, but obeyed at once. I was standing in front of the bench and she had not realized its terrible import.

"Listen, Alice, I want your help; you must keep tight hold of yourself. Something terrible has happened. Mrs. Norris is very ill; she may be dead—I don't know—who is their doctor? I must phone him at once."

I spoke with as little emotion as I could confine my voice to, and I thought it better to so break to her the awful tidings.

"Dr. Wilkins, sir," she replied at once. "I don't know his number.

Where is Mrs. Norris? I must go to her. Do you think she is——" And abruptly she stopped. I saw her gaze was rooted on the settle behind me, and into her eyes there came a dawning horror.

"Yes," I answered her unspoken query. "I brought her in from the grounds — we can do nothing — wait for the doctor," said I quickly as I searched the book for his number.

"But where is Mr. Norris? Shouldn't I get him at once, sir?" she asked hastily with some natural agitation.

"No. The fact is, Alice, that Mr. Norris himself has been taken with this strange sickness—I do not know if he still lives, I have no time to explain now—apparently some horrible insects have invaded the place—little red—scarlet—flies. I do not know, can not understand, but I believe them to be most frightfully poisonous. We can not be too careful, keep every window and door closed. If you see such a thing, a tiny brilliant red fly, kill it at once! don't let it get near you! Now Miss Maynard is in the den—you must go to her—but wait! I will phone first." And as I spoke I made a dash to the instrument, from which the directory was suspended.

At that second a clamor broke from the instrument.

"Hello!" I cried harshly. "For God's sake get off the line—sickness—urgent!"

"Not so fast, my friend!" responded a rather reedy voice with a decided foreign accent. "Now don't hang up!" it continued sharply as with an oath I was about to dash the receiver into its hook. "I shall call up again at once, and until you listen. Moreover, medical aid is utterly impotent to combat the sickness of your friends."

"But," I interrupted astounded, "who are you? What——"

"Don't get excited. You are only delaying matters, and probably imperiling the one chance of life left to your friends. Let me assure you I am quite aware of the conditions which are distressing you; to prove this—well, those are most extraordinary insects, are they not? Ah! that is sufficient," added the voice with a chuckle of triumph as a gasp of amazement broke from my lips. "Well, now we can proceed. Listen carefully; I shall be brief. But hold! are you Haydon or Trent? and who are those attacked?" he queried abruptly and anxiously.

"Mr. Norris, Mrs. Norris and Trent. I am Haydon." The words were jerked quite involuntarily from me; for the moment my condition was one bordering upon hypnotic servility, such was my amazement.

"Ah!" the satisfaction in the voice was as undeniable as it was careless of detection. "Well, fate has been gracious, though your friend was an unpremeditated incident. To be entirely candid I may state that I am the gratified author of this visitation. Why? Well, for the moment time presses—possibly some day. However, let us to business. This morning Mr. Norris received by mail a small package. There was neither word nor sign of sender or contents; I had no intention there should be. Opening it he simply discovered a common cardboard box. But upon removing the lid he would be puzzled, possibly also amused, to discover that the box held nothing more nor less than a dozen tiny winged insects, yet remarkable for their brilliant scarlet hue. For a brief space probably they would be inactive, stupefied by the previous darkness.

"Peering more closely, likely he would conceive that he had been the victim of some crude practical joke, little guessing that these strange insignificant things contained within them a power so deadly that their bite slays more rapidly, more assuredly, and more agonizingly, than the venom of the most deadly reptile known.

"It is very simple, a mere product of Mother Nature, a combination of alkaloids akin to the cyanides which so far has eluded the synthetic chemist; attacking the blood with incredible malignancy it inflicts excruciating agony upon the subject invaded. You may take my word for this; I am scrupulously accurate in these absorbing details. Where and how I acquired these deadly little things need not delay us at present—the main thing is that after years of toil and sundry mishaps to certain unsuspicious members of a tribe of New Guinea headhunters I discovered an antidote, or rather a drug with remarkable potency in counteracting the virulence of these deadly little insects. For though to all intents the victim is stone-dead inside of fifteen minutes, yet the condition for another twenty-four hours is one of intense coma, a suspension of the vital processes so complete that the keenest scrutiny and the finest of medical skill would fail to detect that organic death had not taken place. This, I assure you, is simple fact, and the drug I alone possess is the sole antidote.

"Now I am somewhat of a gambler, therefore of fatalistic temperament, and even now I would leave the issue of this act of justice in the hands of the gods; moreover, the game would act as a tonic to my spirits, now deprived of the thrill of anticipation. Therefore I propose to offer you freely the result of my labors, imposing simply a single condition, that by your unaided efforts you discover the identity of the individual now speaking. A very modest demand, indeed; and no doubt when I state that a mole on the right cheek will aid you materially in your quest for its owner you will see that the situation should prove somewhat diverting for us both!"

Abruptly he ceased and a hard malicious cachinnation tripped on the final words.

By this time I had awakened to the fact that whoever this unknown might be there was no question but that he regarded the frightful tragedy with acute and venomous delight, and incredible though they were, his words carried to me conviction of their strange and terrible truth. His uncanny knowledge of the unique features surrounding this mysterious tragedy effectually disposed of any idea I should otherwise have held regarding his veracity, and his phoning at this dread moment could not be merely an odd coincidence. Yet how, and from what conceivable motive, could this unknown have perpetrated such a diabolical crime? As for his antidote—well, if a part were fact, why not the whole? My brain was in a whirl of conflict.

"But what is the meaning of all this? Do you really intend that with no more than a single slight clue I must discover your identity? And where shall I search? The thing is impossible! It is madness!" I exclaimed desperately.

"No, I'm not insane," came the reedy voice quite coolly. "That is the offer; you can accept it or not as you choose. But—remember the lives of your friends are hanging by a thread, and the thread will snap exactly twenty-four hours from now; for after that hour no human aid can avail; the drug is impotent. Come! it is your one chance. You may win, if the gods so decide; if not, you can not lose what is already lost. I give you my word that for twenty-four hours I shall be in San Francisco, neither under cover nor seeking to elude detection. On your part you engage to receive in person from my hands this drug, relying entirely on your own acumen to achieve this object; failure to observe this single condition will break the compact—and do not forget that your every step will be known to me. Now *adios!* A great game we play, with three lives the stakes!" He cried the

final words with a callous humor so savage and malignant that involuntarily I shrank from the instrument as though his devilish personality had possessed it.

Abruptly a flood of fear and despair swept upon me. "Hello! Hello!" I shouted imploringly over and over again, but never a murmur came back over the wire. He had gone! And then for a moment I lost self-control and almost sanity as I hurled invective and imprecation into the soulless thing until a discreet cough close beside me arrested my tumultuous outpourings and I turned to see Alice eyeing me with amazement; for of course she could have no idea of the astounding and terrible statements I had listened to, my part in the conversation being negligible.

"I beg your pardon—I forgot," I stammered with contrition. "But the man is such a fiend. It is terrible—if I can believe him!" I cried in a breath.

"What is it, sir? Can I be of any use?" she asked very earnestly.

"I am afraid—well, why not?" The query illuminated my mind quite unconsciously; though the self-restraint and quiet courage of this ladylike girl no doubt gave birth to it. "I don't know. I myself am bewildered; I don't know what to think or decide—and decide I must without a moment's delay. Yet life and death depend upon the decision. Briefly, here are the facts. Either I have been listening to a maniac with an utterly impossible knowledge of this awful tragedy; or on the other hand the most ingenious and diabolical criminal one can conceive has set me an utterly impossible task to avert the results of a most atrocious crime," and briefly I outlined the astounding statements I had just listened to. "Why, the thing is impossible!" I exclaimed miserably. "A condition imposed by a diseased and thwarted brain, malignant and callous as a Nero; for the evidence connecting him with these frightful happenings is undeniable. Now whatever on earth am I to do? Is it fact that he possesses such a drug? and if so what chance have I of ever handling it? I don't know what to do; yet every moment is priceless. The whole thing is a fearful nightmare!" I cried desperately, more voicing my distraction than appealing for advice.

"But the doctor, sir!" Alice reminded me.

"Of course!" said I, snatching again at the receiver. "I am so stunned by this frightful thing that I can not think sanely," I muttered, bitterly contemptuous of my impotent brain.

"Hello! Hello! Why the devil don't you answer?" I called anxiously into the instrument as I viciously jangled the little arm. But still there was no response. Again and again I attacked it, and not the faintest murmur came over the line.

"Good God!" I exclaimed in dawning conviction. "It's gone dead! I wonder?—I believe that madman by some means is at the bottom of this. If so he must be quite near us," I cried as I slammed the useless thing back on its hook and stood at the door as though expecting the unknown to enter.

"How can that be? He was speaking on it only a moment ago," cried Alice.

"It's a single line to the main road, and that's half a mile away; somewhere in the grounds he must have cut in on it—quite simple if you know how and have a sender," said I bitterly.

This was simple fact; the main road lay outside the extreme breadth of the estate, the house being close to the water and the grounds practically a small isthmus running into the bay. It would indeed, concealed in the shrubbery, be a simple matter to cut the line and affix an instrument.

"Yes, he has made sure that neither police nor doctor should be summoned until too late," I added despairingly.

Though he had asserted the impotency of medical skill to combat the virulence, yet now this very act convinced me to the contrary.

"I would leave at once, sir—the sedan, I know, is ready. I saw Mr. Norris fill the tank early this morning. They can not be beyond recovery, or the villain would never have gone to all this trouble," cried Alice hopefully. She too had been struck by the logical inference of the act.

"By George! I believe you are right, Alice—I'll make a run for the nearest house and phone a doctor from there—Denison's is the nearest, isn't it?" I asked quickly.

"Yes, their house is on the other side of the road about a quarter of a mile from our gates. But what——" she exclaimed suddenly. And at that instant I caught it too—the unmistakable crunchy swish of rubber tires on a paved road; poor Norris had spared no expense on the estate.

I stared at Alice. Why we should feel startled I don't know, for the Norris's had hosts of friends, and visiting cars were no rarity at any time of the day. I suppose really that any ordinary, commonplace sound would have had a like effect upon nerves strung to such a pitch as ours.

"Good heavens! they can not know a thing about these brutes!—perhaps women and children?—I must warn them!" I exclaimed in horror as the possibilities of the situation flashed upon me. As I spoke I rushed to the door.

"Keep back, Alice!" I cried.

"Stop! They're here—coming up the steps," exclaimed Alice, darting forward and laying her shapely white fingers on mine that gripped the door handle.

Instantly my grip relaxed and I stood listening.

She was right; for now quite audibly there came the little rasping grind of a slight pressure of brakes accompanied by the sound of a hastily opened door and followed by the rustle of a hurried exit. A light foot came pattering up the steps and onto the broad veranda.

"A woman!" I exclaimed in dismay as the steps halted at the door. "Quick, Alice! stand back, I must get her in! Watch out for those brutes!" I cried as there came a staccato volley of insistent rapping on the solid oak panels.

"Come in! Quick!" I snapped harshly as I whipped open the door—an abrupt, even discourteous, invitation, but apparently one that coincided with the purpose of our visitor. Even as I spoke the figure of a woman flicked past me. I slammed the door. "All right, Alice?" I cried.

"Yes, not one passed through, I am certain," she replied with quiet assurance. Casting one searching glance around, I turned to our visitor, now standing close to Alice, who had drawn back several paces.

Wrapped in a long gray dust-cloak, a motoring-veil covering her face and driving gauntlets her hands, she might have been any one of a thousand women one meets on a dusty road most efficiently ignoring the aid of a totally unnecessary chauffeur. Her figure was of the modern vogue—slim, straight as a lath, and as near to that of a youth as it is possible for repressive art to emulate. In stature she might have been a trifle over the average. Doubtless to the more critical eye of her sex further and more significant details would be apparent; indeed, since that date a certain lady having read these lines has smiled in derisive though kindly tolerance at the meager picture here presented. Nevertheless, how could a mere male note, for instance, that a veil was secured at the back, or observing, realize the singular nature of such a fastening? However, of one fact even the dullest wit could not remain in ignorance, and that was apparent at her first word.

"Sorry, Madam," I apologized hastily, "to appear discourteous, but you

arrived at a terrible moment. A frightful tragedy has just taken place and we ourselves are in a position of much danger!"

"Danger?" she echoed incredulously, and though the word was barely more than a whisper and the sound muffled by the veil, yet there could be no mistaking the alien intonation. "Danger?" she repeated. "I do not understand. It is very strange—I come to you for aid—ah, yes! my poor friend, she is ill, perhaps dying, and I stand here! Please come at once," she implored eagerly and with rising excitement, though her voice still retained its low muffled quality.

"They attacked you?" I cried.

"Attacked!" she exclaimed in bewilderment.

"Yes, those terrible insects—little red flies."

"Red flies? very little, very bright?" she queried with a rising note of sudden recognition.

"Ah! I thought so—they attacked your friend. God only knows what they are or from where they have come, but one thing is certain—they are deadly! Three of my friends have been attacked and lie lifeless—or so it seems. I was setting out for a doctor as you arrived; the phone is useless—cut, I think," I added with vehement bitterness.

"I do not understand. It is something very terrible, I think," she exclaimed very haltingly. "Your friends—what has injured them? And those flies—they are so little! It can not be that they should alarm you?"

"But you saw what happened! Did your friend not become ill after you noticed them?" I demanded.

"Yes, it is so; I saw them—two, I think. They came from the outside. We were running very slowly. She waved her hand at them, but one would not go but flew to her cheek. Then she gave a little cry of pain and crushed the fly with her hand. In a few minutes she was taken ill—oh, so ill! such terrible pain, and as we passed your place she fell against me senseless. So I turned in here for aid. And now you say that your friends have the same sickness, and they die! Is it that my dear friend is to die also? Oh, it can not be! You must aid her—I implore you, sir. At least come out to the car and——"

"Ah! Thank heaven! Of course there is your car—it is ready!" I exclaimed. "It will save time getting one out from the garage. I will take your friend to the nearest doctor. It would only waste time to remove her, and I can do no good. Her life and three others perhaps hang on a few moments! Excuse me, this lady will explain," I cried impatiently as a faint gasp of dismay broke from her. I was on fire to be off; I was convinced that a poison of incredible virulence had been injected into the blood of my friends and this poor lady and only immediate medical attention might avert the dread culmination. As for the communication of that horrible madman—now that some definite action was imminent and my brain had cleared from the first paralyzing blow I thought no more of the utterly impossible offer the insane criminal had so cynically proffered, and chancing everything would adopt the only rational course.

A couple of rapid steps and I was at the door; my fingers gripped the knob, when sharp as a knife-edge a cry of warning cut through the silent hall.

"Stop! Mr. Haydon!" cried the clear voice of Alice, now high-pitched and vibrant with the tensity of conviction. "There is something wrong! Oh, quick!" The cry of warning followed like the crack of a whip hard upon a single fierce ejaculation in a foreign tongue.

Instantly I wheeled—and faced the grim menace of a leveled automatic grasped by a slim gloved hand.

Erect, motionless, silent, in its very immobility there lay a promise of

something superlatively virile and deadly out of all proportion to the slender physique of the cloaked figure —and the hand that held that little gun was so infernally steady. Moreover, unseen by me, some adroit move of the quiet figure had now brought Alice and me into a target that could be covered by the merest flick of the hand.

I SIMPLY stared and waited, for a leveled automatic brooks no argument. I was thankful to see that Alice had evidently arrived at a like conclusion; for though white and horror-stricken, yet she stood bravely without a tremor, simply waiting and watching, as I was doing.

I was astounded, but quite cool and collected; there is a limit of nerve response to external stimuli, and for the moment I think my limit had been reached, although intuitively I knew that this menacing figure was no member of the sex so successfully counterfeited; yet beyond the recognition of the sex factor instinct afforded no further revelation. There was indeed a something stirring within me, a haunting welling up of the sub-conscious, but originating in a region so remote from the normal sense perceptions that it failed to impress upon the brain a concrete thought-image, and I had no thought of the fearful extent of our misfortune.

Abruptly there broke from the veiled figure a short, rasping, malicious laugh; rather, an unmirthful, sardonic expression of evil triumph. It set my teeth on edge and my flesh felt as though smitten by a bitter, icy wind.

"Well, my friend, I perceive that you possess a degree of intelligence; that is well, for you realize the folly of resistance. Let me assure you that the slightest move without my sanction will result in your instant demise, a fate that likewise would be shared by this charming lady—keep quite still, please!"

Unconsciously I must have betrayed some slight sign of the impulse for instant action that boiled within me. At the harsh ferocity that vibrated in his words an electric shock jarred my fagged nerves and there awoke in me a vivid recollection. Barely half an hour ago I listened to a voice as replete with malignant ferocity and venomous hate.

Instantly on the recognition I was convinced; there could be no shadow of doubt: here, holding our lives in a twitch of his finger, stood the author of the most merciless and inexplicable crime one could conceive.

Coherent thought deserted me; a sudden sense of helplessness and vast consternation overwhelmed me; in my brain was nothing but a seething chaos of flickering images born of the tumult. One thing alone I saw clearly, and that was: this madman would on the slightest pretext, or lacking it, snuff out our lives!

"Well, my friend, I see you have arrived at the obvious and logical conclusion," he sneered—doubtless my face had mirrored my conviction—though now his voice was under control, and indeed I sensed that my consternation was not displeasing to him. "Yes," he continued after a slight pause, "you behold the author of the most ingenious revenge ever conceived. And yet it is simple — so simple! Your friend receives a small parcel—but you probably are aware of the *modus operandi;* at any rate time is short. Apparently the millionth chance has left you unharmed —but to what end? You are impotent either to aid them or embarrass me. I admit that my presence is a tactical error—strangers may intrude upon our little *tête-à tête* any moment, and you of course have acquired a rough estimate of my person but no more than would equally apply to a thousand others, and this disguise precludes a closer scrutiny. Naturally I shall be compelled to adopt some means of enforcing your silence for a

little after my departure; and I flatter myself that my identity will forever remain a mystery. But time presses—doubtless you have grasped the reason of my visit?" added this extraordinary ruffian in a tone of indifference; yet underlying it I sensed the weakness of a distorted brain. There lay an eager expectancy in his voice that would not be denied and told its own tale: he craved recognition by his fellows, their adulation of his prowess; an obsession almost invariably dominating the insane.

I resolved to gratify his arrogant vanity; I could lose nothing by doing so and would at any rate gain a little respite to collect my thoughts.

"Your object? I am afraid not—it is beyond me," I replied slowly, shaking my head as though confronted by an astuteness I could not fathom. "I also fail to gather the object of bragging about an utterly impossible antidote," I added with contempt in my voice.

I admit that I was taking big chances to adopt such a tone and attack, but I had made up my mind as he spoke that I would chance everything to obtain confirmation of his assertion that he had knowledge of an antidote. For I could not, and would not, believe that my dear friends had really passed into the great silence; it was possible that this cunning maniac truly had some means of combating an accidental personal encounter with his abominable brood—the insane being but rarely indifferent to their own safety.

"Impossible?" he snapped with arrogant braggadocio. "By no means, my simple friend—merely the extraction of a complex alkaloid, the base of a crude decoction of certain rare herbs. It may interest you to learn that even now I have the preparation upon my person and it would be but a matter of moments to restore the stricken to their normal uninteresting condition. But I assure you this is not my intention."

He paused and I sensed the intense malignancy underlying his suave voice.

"No, my good friend, I have not toiled and endured for years to surrender now the sweet fruits of revenge."

"Revenge!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, revenge!" he snarled, and the hiss of a snake was the sound of his voice. "Rather, justice on a heartless villain, a scoundrel who stole our lands and brought an honored name to beggary and shame. We, of the noblest blood of Castile; we, whose estates were the richest of the Philippines! Yet were we as children in this man's hands, so that by fraud and smooth-voiced lies little by little he wrested our lands from us, until in the end we became homeless, disgraced beggars—a poverty that closed my father's shame with suicide and left my mother dependent for every crust upon begrudged charity; while I, a mere boy, became an outcast, a pauper among paupers; hopeless save for the bitter hate that burnt into my soul like fire and drove me to success through humiliation and peril, that scourged me through the hell of those years, always before me the glorious end, the day of days—this day! Ah! never a night for ten years but have I prayed to God and devil for this day!"

He ceased abruptly as though emotion strangled utterance.

"Ten years!" I exclaimed in assumed contempt, trusting to egg him on to a further oration and so gain time for some providential interruption or accident to distract his attention for the brief second I coveted. "Why, ten years ago Norris was but a lad. How could he have——"

"I do not speak of your friend," he interrupted impatiently. "It is his father, his lying, heartless father, now beyond my grasp—may hell ring forever with his cries! But what matter, father or son? The blood is the same—remorseless, steeped in avarice,

rotten with deceit and pride. Yet I, the despised, insignificant pauper, have torn the mighty from their seats and made of them but a handful of dust worth no more than so much nourishment for worms. And the means? so simple, so efficient; see the derision of fate! A tiny insect, a mere speck—a hundred could be crushed by the hand of a child. Yet their bite—ah! it is not nice; two of my Papuan packers died that way—I knew then that heaven had guided my steps in that wild land. A mere chance encounter amid untrodden swamps, which even the savage head-hunters avoid, and there the tool is ready to my hand. Alone again I entered that swamp of horrible death. How carefully I captured and tended those little specks of winged death! With what joy I watched them daily in their glass prison that never left my person; many died and I mourned them as a youth mourns a sweetheart, but sufficient survived for my purpose when I reached your accursed shores. For the second time—years before I had worked in your great cities—I abased myself to learn your hated tongue, for I left no stone unturned. Ah! never again shall I know such ecstasy of spirit as then transported me."

The final words were uttered in a tone of melancholy and regret, as one mourning an irreparable loss; yet I sensed that never for a second did his alert watchfulness waver. I craved but for a single second; but that second was denied. I knew that behind that veil his eyes were implacably set upon me and the slightest movement would meet with an instant response.

"But I waste time!" the voice was again a snarl of vibrant hate; his mood had changed with the abrupt transition of the madman. "I came here to witness the tardy justice that has overtaken this execrable family—these accursed, impotent ones. Lead the way at once; this lady also, one pace behind you. Remember! one false move of either and I press this trigger and both die! Quick!" The command might have been the snarl of an infuriated tiger.

THERE was nothing to do but obey; for I knew that instant death awaited the faintest suspicion of resistance.

I stepped ahead of Alice; as I passed I endeavored to flash a glance pregnant with meaning. But, since she faced our captor, no sign of recognition or response was possible. Her face was white as a sheet, but her eyes were steady and her lips firmly set. I knew I could rely upon her when the moment came — for there was to be a "moment." Desperation had so sharpened my mental processes that in a moment my brain had discovered, explored, and discarded a dozen avenues of offensive and finally alighted on one that was instantly approved, though the risk was monstrous.

"Very well," said I in as level a tone as I could summon. "We go through that door to the left." I steeled my nerves to the shock of the actual words. Little wonder, for with them I had thrown down my last, and likely fatal, card. And the result had to be shared equally by my brave companion; for I was entirely satisfied that he would have as little hesitation or mercy as an enraged cobra.

I knew that wittingly there was not the faintest hope of inducing him to precede us through that door, yet, I had staked everything on his doing so—for my poor friend lay behind the door to the right!

The door I had indicated led directly into the billiard room, a late addition and at a slightly lower level than the main building; a depression that was spanned by three or four shallow steps affixed at this entrance. At the moment of speaking I possessed no conscious plan; it seemed almost as though the words were dragged out of me. But subcon-

sciously I must have weighed the man's erratic psychology very acutely; for with the first step there came to me in a flash a certain knowledge of the only possible line of action—a move crude in the extreme, but for that very reason possible.

"Walk quickly! and you, Madam, one pace behind," he snapped impatiently.

His impatience tripped on the heels of my own. Instantly I quickened my steps. Now the die was cast I was on fire to settle the matter one way or the other, for I was convinced that once his object was accomplished no witness would survive the moment.

The door lay across the wide hall, perhaps twenty feet distant, yet it seemed ten times that space and each step the deliberate motion of a clock's minute hand, though a bare few seconds must actually have passed.

I halted silently as though awaiting his command.

"Open the door! What are you waiting for?" he cried harshly.

The critical moment had arrived! I laid my hand on the knob; my nerves at such tension I could have yelled, or burst into mirthless laughter, I turned it, then rattled the thing this way and that; presumably it was locked or had got jammed in some manner, for it refused to open. Without an instant's hesitation I leaned forward to bring my weight to bear upon it. That is to say as far as I dared, for another ounce would have shot me headlong through the open doorway, the sole opposition to its opening being the inward grip of my left hand opposing that of my thrusting right! Only the fact that this twofold action was hidden by my close-pressing body could have veiled the simulated effort.

"What's the matter?" he snapped angrily.

"Jammed! The door is new—always trouble with it," I gasped out jerkily, as though winded by my vigorous efforts. As a matter of fact it was the hammering of my racing heart that, nearly throttling me, lent such a veracious air to the words.

I had staked everything on his impatience strangling his caution, and I could not hope to sustain this camouflage. I grunted, gripped, and thrust; still no move from behind! The perspiration of acute suspense streamed into my eyes, yet a deadly chill coursed my spine. I could stand it no longer, my nerves were fairly screaming—I had failed! I was about to spin around for one wild flying leap to meet the black unknown awaiting me.

"Let me help, Mr. Haydon," the low sweet tones of Alice came in the nick of time.

I caught the rustle of her dress as she made a forward step. Of course she knew that this door required no particular effort to open, and her quick brain had informed her that it was here I had decided to play a desperate move. Intuitively she must have realized that I was on the point of breaking and interceded in a brave hope of attracting attention to herself. It failed, but it was our salvation.

"Keep back! keep back or I shoot!" he screamed excitedly, and then, possibly swept off his feet by the suspicion of opposition to his will, his cold cunning for an instant forsook him, as I had gambled on its doing.

"Here, you fool, put your weight on it!" he growled as there came a quick step and an arm in the hated drab coat — never since have I been able to endure that neutral hue—shot underneath and grazed my left arm, while a thin gloved hand fell palm outward with a vicious crack on the nearest panel; at the same second a small hard something was thrust between my shoulder-blades. Yet, strangely, that devilish pressure steadied my nerves as nothing else had.

"It's coming!" I gasped as a thin black line appeared between the door and its jamb. I could not prevent it,

his added weight had forced me forward, my balance was toppling. The moment had come!

"One more!" I cried in a voice that owed no note to simulation. I caught a glimpse of his arm crooking for a stronger thrust. And then both my hands were whipped from their hold, and as the strike of a rattler my right hand caught the crooked arm and using it as a pivot spun me around so that we hurtled through the wide open doorway, my body jammed into his back and my whole weight full upon him. But instantaneous as the action was I received the impression of something striking me with vicious force across the spine, coincident with a crashing report and a stabbing pain that seared my neck. I had no thought of what it meant; living or dead I meant to alight with my full one hundred and eighty pounds upon him. Which is exactly what happened.

THE whole thing from start to finish was over in a second, and I could not then know that as I spun and flung my arms around him, pinning his arms helpless in the hope of rendering any gun-play futile, the weapon had been sent flying by a plucky blow from my companion as I whirled around. I owed to her my life; for undoubtedly the bullet that merely grazed my neck would but for her have shattered my spine.

His sensory reactions were as instinctive and instantaneous as a predatory cat's; for, taken by surprize as he was, in a twinkling he realized my intent, and as we plunged through the doorway his trunk was bent in an arch of steel in an attempt to break my hold, reverse our positions and himself become the uppermost. But, even had his strength been greater than mine, there was no time to effect the change. His very struggle made for his destruction; for the brunt of the fall was borne by his head and shoulders, which struck the polished hardwood floor with a sickening crash.

Without a groan the straining muscles abruptly sagged in my grip. But he was so cunning and quick-witted, it might be a trick, and until I got a leg-hold behind his knees that nothing short of a crowbar could have pried loose, I gave him my undivided attention.

"Alice! Quick!" I called. "Something to tie him up—curtains, anything!" I begged urgently; I had no desire to compete again, or for long, with the huge strength I had felt well up in his weedy frame before we crashed.

"Will this belt help? Here!" came her instant response as she slipped to my side.

I dared not take my eyes from him as I stretched out my hand for the belt—a thin, pliable affair that she had stripped from her waist; a slender enough lashing, but it would serve for the moment.

"Fine! Run it twice crossways round his wrists, then buckle," I ordered as with a rapid movement I drew the limp hands together and pinioned them in my left, while my right I held clenched ready to drive home a smashing blow should he show the least sign of reviving. In a second her deft fingers were weaving the strap in and out as I directed.

"Good!" I exclaimed with relief as, taking the loose end from her, I secured it with a hitch. "Now get anything handy and we'll make a good job of it."

The veil that had hidden his face was hanging in a torn wisp still attached to the wide-brimmed hat now fallen aside. It was the countenance of a Latin — with an admixture — and though, in outline certainly possessing the refinement of Castilian progenitors, yet the strain of another and darker blood was undeniable. For the thin, almost cadaverous, cheeks were sallow-hued, even yellowish with

the saffron tinge of unmistakable mulatto origin. As the type goes it was a distinctly well-favored face; or rather had been. Lips, nose and forehead were delicately molded; and though chin and upper lip were hidden by a short, jet-black, pointed beard and mustache, yet it required no great discernment to be assured they were firm and of a piece with the features visible. The eyes beneath the fine-penciled brows were closed, but, however striking in hue and vital, would be sadly marred by the deep hollows in which they lay. Deep-graven lines ran between the brows and far up the forehead, while others scored and meshed the cheeks. Yet the flesh was firm and betrayed not the least sign of the falling away so inseparable from the passage of life's "divide." I had the impression of beholding one in whom the emotions had run riot and, submerging the intellect, had attained entire dominance of the ego. Such faces are found not infrequently amid martyrs, bomb-throwers, and madhouses.

Of course at the time I did not tabulate these matters, but that is the impression I retained and later itemized.

I heard a sound of tinkling curtain rings, and in a minute my companion was again at my side.

"Will these do?" she asked, holding out the long, flimsy things she had torn from their rods.

"Right! Keep an eye on the brute while I fix him," I admonished her as I rapidly twisted the fabric rope-wise.

Quickly I had him bound hand and foot. As I secured the last knot there broke from my captive a choking groan and his eyes slowly opened. A pair of piercing black eyes stared blankly into mine. Suddenly a light of recognition and hate flashed into them and his muscles heaved and strained as he strove to rise; while I, snatching up a near-by chair, stood beside him ready to go the limit if necessary. But his utmost efforts were unavailing and in a few seconds he appeared to realize that fact. His head craned forward, chin on chest. An animal snarl of rage and defiance broke from him as he glimpsed his bonds.

"Well, you infernal beast!" I exclaimed triumphantly. "For two pins I'd smash your skull in!" For the moment I was barely less animal than he; I only knew that I wanted to kill this thing, tear it into rags with my bare hands. A scream pierced the room.

"Look out! the flies!" screamed Alice, who had stepped back a few paces as I spoke.

In a flash I leapt across his body and whirled around—and by a fraction of a second escaped the onslaught of three tiny scarlet missiles, which undoubtedly would have impinged upon my bare neck but for her warning; I was still without a coat and clad only in my tennis flannels.

They passed like ricocheting bullets, a mere flick of color. They had missed their mark, but such was the ferocity or lust for blood of these things that in the same instant they discovered another. Like a dropping stone they shot downward—but for their vivid hue I do not think their descent would have been visible—and lit on our captive's cheek.

A frightful scream broke from the prone man. With an exclamation of horror — in which concern for the stricken had no share—I stooped and with a slashing blow of my open hand crushed two to a red smear on his cheek; the third evaded my blow and shot upward over my head.

"Look out for yourself, Alice! One has escaped! Are the windows all closed?" I cried, though I never removed my eyes from the last victim.

This was terrible; for if he became unconscious before I had time for a few words, then I knew my last hope had gone with him, the hope that had spurred me to this attack even more

strongly than the instinct of self-preservation. I must not waste a second—and I realized that indeed the time was short.

"You're bitten," said I coolly, though heaven only knew what the restraint cost me.

The sound of my voice seemed to awaken him from the trancelike mute terror that had fallen on him.

"They've bitten me! They've bitten me!" he screamed, and in his voice lay abject despair, and a queer little thread of incredulity woven into it.

"Damn' good job, too!" said I with apparent indifference. "Now you'll have a taste of your own devilish medicine. I don't suppose you'll suffer any worse pangs than the others did," I added sneeringly.

It was a difficult rôle I had to sustain. I desired above all things to drive home the impression that I was as implacably callous as he himself; and as I spoke I was torn with anxiety and dread lest all too soon his pangs might inhibit coherent utterance.

"Quick! quick! the serum!" he screamed, and with horror I perceived the muscles of his face contract with the first twinge of the approaching torment.

"Look here, listen!" I had stooped and my lips were close to his ear. "If you don't wish to wake up in the hell waiting for you, don't waste a second. If you really have an antidote, tell me where it is and how used. If it succeeds with the others, then I promise—I swear—I'll do my best for you. Choose! in a minute it will be too late—and the fires of hell will be the brighter."

I broke into a malicious laugh as I ceased. I was attempting to play on his superstition. Likely enough in his thwarted outlook he would have denied contemptuously the existence of heaven or hell, but he was a Latin with the added pressure of a darker strain. Undoubtedly he was a madman, but he also possessed the embers of an intellect that once must have flamed with a singular brilliance and power; for in spite of his growing pangs he could yet concentrate and utilize his mental processes.

At once his frenzy vanished and his eyes grew hard and cool as he stared into mine with a shrewd, piercing penetration, as though weighing my words and character. For maybe five seconds we held silence; then with the beads of agony starting from his forehead he gasped out hoarsely, yet distinctly: "You win—I desire to live! The serum—inside vest—glass tube—each line dose—twice water. Syringe—inject deep—under left arm. Quick! curse you! Oh, my God!"

With the invocation his voice rose to a scream as a more violent paroxysm seized him and the contracting muscles straining against their bonds raised his body in a rigid arch from the floor, while a cream of white froth appeared between the thin, parted lips, from which there now broke forth a horrible choking moaning. But I had neither time nor inclination for the least endeavor to mitigate his sufferings.

My fingers tore at his coat and wrenched it open, tearing off buttons and ripping the fabric in my haste; the light gray suit beneath I treated with like scant ceremony and in a trice had laid back the vest, exposing an inner pocket protected by a buttoned flap. Tearing it open I extracted its contents—a small leather case similar to a three-cigar holder but somewhat thicker and a trifle shorter. The top fastened with an ordinary spring catch, and on pressure it flew back. Snugly fitting inside lay two small objects—a glass-stoppered phial and a hypodermic needle. Carefully withdrawing the former I saw that it was graduated by six slight scratches; its contents appeared to consist of a deep orange-hued powder.

HERE was the antidote! was it possible that this little phial held within it three lives — the fourth I thought not once of. I dared not believe it! Yet again I heard the scream, "The serum! Quick!" and hope leapt within me.

I started to my feet. At any rate it held a chance. I possessed not the slightest knowledge of medicine, and his instructions filled me with apprehension. It seemed a frightful thing thus to tamper with a human being—especially a woman — to pierce the tender flesh so harshly and introduce a compound of which I knew not a single ingredient. But it had to be done.

I saw that Alice was standing beside me. To my shame, for the first time, I had forgotten her existence. I can only plead the intense thought and emotion of those terrible moments.

"It is awful!" she whispered in trembling tones.

I followed her gaze. It was indeed awful! The prone figure was indescribably horrible. No sound issued from his pallid lips now—lips that had fallen apart in ghastly twisted ridges painted by the drying scum now a sickly yellow hue. The black protruding eyes were set in a glassy, unseeing stare deep in the cavernous hollows. Ghastly blotches, puffed and ocher-tinted, had arisen on his sallow cheeks and presented the appearance of some malignant internal growth thrusting forth its tentacles. His chest rose and fell in sudden convulsions, with long intervals between the spasms. It was obvious he was passing into the final coma—at least so he had affirmed, and I prayed it might be so—apparently a characteristic result of this virulent poison.

Though I had not a single grain of pity, yet I was horror-stricken, and for a moment was incapable of movement. Abruptly the end came, the spasms ceased and he lay motionless as a log. For all the evidence I had to the contrary, life had passed.

At once a ghastly fear gripped me: most certainly this man was dead; it was insanity to deem otherwise. This serum—antidote—could only be the baseless illusion of a diseased brain. Stimulated by desperation and this madman's cool assurance I had grasped at a straw; I must be mad myself to have given a thought to such folly! Yet again that scream returned to me. "The serum! Quick!" and again I fell under the spell of his vital personality and unswerving surety of a safety to which he alone possessed the key. At once my course was clear.

"I must try it!" I muttered desperately. "Come, Alice! Mrs. Norris first!" I cried, turning on my heel to rush from the room.

In a single bound I had cleared the low flight of stairs, and only the fleeting pause of alighting checked me in time to avoid a collision with Miss Manners.

"Mr. Haydon!" she exclaimed in a frightened, agitated voice. "What is the matter? What is the meaning of all this?"

Her face was bloodless and her eyes frightened. Good heavens! I had quite forgotten her existence since that human tiger had burst upon us.

"The matter?" I repeated, thinking hard as I spoke. I would have spared her this. But there was no way out of it — no time for explanation or inventing any plausible excuse to get her back to her room—she must take her share in this.

"Sorry—can't explain now—every second is precious—a terrible thing has happened—the Norrises and Trent are either dead or dying—follow me—and please do as I tell you," I cried disjointedly, though in as matter-of-fact a voice as I could summon. But I was careful as I spoke to grope backward with my hand, and catching

the ridge of a panel gently swing the door inward.

Immediately Alice, who had followed me and drawn a little aside, stepped forward and snapped the catch. The movement did not escape Miss Manners, who eyed the door with terror, even while the shock of my words rendered her incapable of speech.

"Come!" I exclaimed. "Be brave; I need your aid." And signing to Alice to assist her I strode quickly across the hall to where under the sweep of the great staircase lay the low window-seat with its pitiable burden.

"My God! Dead!" I heard her gasp as Alice slipped her arm around her and brought her unresisting in my steps.

As though we were the actors in some horrific nightmare, we progressed across that hall. Ghastly dread gripped my soul, dread of what awaited us, dread of what had to be done. With just such fear, I can imagine, must the condemned traverse the space from cell to gallows.

WE REACHED the seat. The poor lady lay exactly as we had left her, but the virulent poison had not then ceased its work. That stricken madman had presented frightful enough evidence of his sufferings and the potency of their source; but compared to what now met my eyes it was a mere nothing. I stood helpless and unable to snatch my gaze from the dreadful sight, and incapable of moving a muscle.

From behind me there came a low moan. It broke the spell, and I spun round—the dropping of a pin would, I think, have produced a like result—limp and senseless Miss Manners lay in Alice's arms.

"She fainted," whispered Alice in a shaking voice.

"Better so!" I muttered dully. "Alice—I daren't do it!" I added hoarsely.

For a moment our eyes met and held each other; in hers there came a light of intense relief; a mere flash and it was gone.

"You must!" she whispered. "Wait — she must lie here for the present." And gently she eased her burden to the floor and with a handy ottoman pillowed the shapely head. Then quickly she stepped to my side and laid her white, strong fingers on my arm. "You must!" she repeated. "It's the only chance—see, I will aid you. I heard the directions—it won't take a minute, and it's so simple!" she pleaded softly; yet her voice conveyed to me the urge and strength of the great spirit that lay within her; it seemed to draw my shuddering spirit from the octopus of black horror, away from the dark caverns of its lair and into the light of resuscitated sanity.

Dumbly I watched her step to the seat and quietly set about her task. Displaying no trace of aversion or even hesitation, she deftly removed, or slipped downward, the upper garments of her mistress. In a moment all was ready.

"Now!" she said simply.

"Water — Alice, water!" I muttered wretchedly.

"Yes? Ah! I forgot. There is some upstairs — in one minute!" she replied at once, at the same time slipping some removed garment over the exposed awful flesh. "Please see if Miss Manners is recovering," she requested quietly. I heard her rapid steps on the stairs above and turned to my charge.

Miserably I turned to the senseless woman. There was little I could do. I caught hold of her limp arms and commenced the slow regular movements so commonly used in restoring the apparently drowned. The occupation distracted my attention—as no doubt Alice had intended—from the, to me, appalling fact that I was alone, or rather a thousand times worse than alone. I do not think I could have

made a half-dozen complete motions —though it seemed an eon had passed —when again I heard racing feet above me and in a second their owner turned the corner. She had brought a small glass carafe, also a couple of large bath towels. And somehow, whether due to these commonplace additions or not I can not say, her presence conveyed to me a subtle affirmation of quiet efficiency that did much to restore my confidence and nerve.

"All right, Alice!" said I reassuringly, for I could not but be conscious of the sharp, questioning glance. "I won't fail now."

"Fail! You've done it all so far. If they live they owe their lives to you."

"Thank you, Alice, though without you I should have been helpless," I replied humbly.

She made no response, but at once turned to the terrible seat. I dared not watch, so set about my preparations; measuring the prescribed dose into the phial, then pouring in the water, for which I had no measure but most carefully gaged. Replacing the glass stopper I set the thing down, and charging the hypodermic from the carafe saw that its working condition was perfect. Everything was ready; now my will had asserted itself again I was eager to get to work without delay, whatever might be the result.

My brain was calm and firm, my hand was steady. Since the return of Alice a remarkable change had come over me; the acute nerve tension I had experienced had vanished; I felt equal to any duty or emergency. It was as though some run-down internal spring within me had been rewound and for the term of that winding the mechanism of nature would proceed smoothly.

"All ready, Mr. Haydon," said Alice gently.

I turned and stepped to the left side of the still figure; Alice stood immediately behind the once lovely head.

I can not endure even to think of the sight that met my eyes; I have no wish by one word to recall the horror of it. Sufficient that the tender exquisite body had been invaded by the ghastly disfigurement that, spewing its abomination over the countenance, had so shattered my nerve. Not once did I bestow a single glance on my companion; I dared not risk a glimpse of anything that would in any way associate me with the living, or remind me of the common bond of humanity connating me with this awful thing.

"Lift the left arm level with the shoulder, please." I heard the words and knew that I had spoken, but the voice was quite unknown to me.

As in a nightmare I watched the arm slowly rise to the position I had indicated. Mutely I held out the phial, and a hand from nowhere gripped it; rapidly I inserted the nose of the syringe and filled it; then, refixing the needle, I stooped. . . .

Thank God it was finished!

I dared not think, I dared not hope. Only was I conscious of an eternity, an agony of suspense. My horizon, my whole world was bounded by a little circle of puffed flesh, in the center of which I still to the hilt held the slender steel cylinder. I had not the slightest idea of the period that must elapse before any indication of returning life might be expected to become apparent—if ever. A great weariness had come upon me; all I wanted was rest. I felt vaguely annoyed by the loud tick of the hall clock; it seemed such an inadequate method of spanning emotion.

Ah! what was that?

Hardly breathing, I stared at the thin thread of delicate pink that, radiating from the needle puncture, had sprung suddenly into existence. No more than a thread as fine as silk, as delicate in hue as the area it invaded was foul, it was living! It

lengthened with a motion quite perceptible, and as it went, it broadened rapidly. Longer and longer, wider and wider it blossomed, for I had the impression of gazing at the growth of a flower concentrated into seconds. Now another similar thread had arisen from the same center, and at a diverging course invaded adjacent territory. As it ran, out burst still another, then another. Then from all sides there sprang innumerable radiating lines of this invading color. Farther and farther out they pushed, lengthening and broadening as they went until in a moment around their common center they had joined and formed a disk, ever extending, of pinky hue. So rapidly soon did they coalesce that shortly my palm would not have covered the span of their joint invasion.

I did not grasp immediately the nature, the significance of their loveliness. I could only watch in amazement and suspense, so startling was the abrupt transformation of the ghastly territory they subdued.

Then in a flash it came to me and I knew, knew I was gazing at warm glowing flesh resurrected from the grip of death!

"Is it——?" whispered Alice in a shaking voice charged with such emotion that she could not complete the sentence.

For the first time since her return from her errand I raised my head and met her eyes. In them lay an agony of appeal and doubt. Like a physical blow there came to me the realization of what this noble girl had suffered, how heroically she had overcome her emotion and fear and sustained me in our frightful experience; yet in spite of the brave mastery of self and her supreme courage she was woman, just a woman, the helpmate and joy of man. In that second the future was born.

"I believe—I am sure life is quickening!" I cried triumphantly, and my words were halting and stumbling with emotion.

NO NEED to recount in detail the toil of the hours. In ten minutes respiration had been established; in less than thirty it was normal and the patient conscious, though weak and somewhat dazed; slight traces of the ghastly disfigurement still remained, but in a few hours these, too, had vanished.

So in each case the antidote justified the vaunting surety of the brilliant, thwarted brain that had compounded it. But of all our patients, strange to say, the author of our misery, the human tiger who had so nearly accomplished his fiendish object—his was the case that we labored longest over; in fact not until, as a last resource, I had administered a second injection did he show the faintest signs of returning animation. And though we labored conscientiously—to this effect I had passed my word—yet under that roof he never regained consciousness but lay in a condition of stupor until the following day, when in the prison hospital he suddenly broke silence with a frightful screaming interspersed with incoherent ravings. It needed but a single shrewd glance from the medical man in charge, and shortly he became an inmate of the ward reserved for dangerous maniacs in the county asylum. Regarding his antecedents but little has come to light. His ravings have established the fact that he is a native of the Philippines, has received a first-class education, and is probably a member of one of the aristocratic families who, spite of native admixture, were more Spanish in sentiment than in complexion.

One can only surmise that his may have been one of those intractable families who, vainly opposing our kindly rule after 1898, had for treachery and cold-blooded assassination been very justly deprived of their wealth and estates. Norris' father

had participated in that campaign; in fact he was for a period in control of operations over a considerable area. Possibly he may have been the immediate instrument of their punishment, or in some way been prominently identified with it. That such punishment was well merited would be to the sufferers a mere insignificant detail.

The two facts are suggestive; there lies indeed a vast gap between, which likely may never be bridged, but the correlation is at present the only solution to what otherwise is inexplicable.

As for the unique agents, those devilish little specks of winged death, no more was ever seen or heard of them. Either we accounted for them all—Alice had killed the last of the three that had so nearly got me—or they had perished in the chill nights that immediately succeeded their advent. Whether their virulence, left to run its course, would have effected a fatal termination is of course entirely a matter of conjecture. An examination of the blood of the sufferers has indeed been made by experts, but beyond the fact that the corpuscles exhibited slight structural changes in isolated groups and unusual cohesive tendencies for a few days after the attack, there were no data obtained of any recognizable compound that would account for the terrible effects resulting.

Trent and I still frequently visit the Norrises, and yet another is always of our little party; and if I was of a jealous disposition I might be excused, for they all make such a fuss over my wife Alice.

Lilith in the Red Land

By **HARVEY W. FLINK**

Great Ashatar is silent as the stars:
The dragon and the cormorant possess
The streets that end in desert emptiness;
And all its men have perished in glad wars.

In silver clouds vast herds of unicorns
Descend upon the city in the night;
They battle with the savage bulls, and fight
Until the blood drips from their pointed horns.

A serpent, writhing in the sickly light,
Uncoils its length above the scarlet flood;
And staring at the wounded bulls in flight
It laps with avid lips their ravished blood;
A mottled serpent with a woman's face,
The first and last of all its loathly race.

THE MIRRORS of TUZUN THUNE

ROBERT E. HOWARD

"Kull!" The yell split the silence into a million vibratory fragments.

"A wild, weird clime that lieth sublime
Out of Space, out of Time."

—Poe.

THERE comes, even to kings, the time of great weariness. Then the gold of the throne is brass, the silk of the palace becomes drab. The gems in the diadem and upon the fingers of the women sparkle drearily like the ice of the white seas; the speech of men is as the empty rattle of a jester's bell and the feel comes of things unreal; even the sun is copper in the sky and the breath of the green ocean is no longer fresh.

Kull sat upon the throne of Valusia and the hour of weariness was upon him. They moved before him in an endless, meaningless panorama, men, women, priests, events and shadows of events; things seen and things to be attained. But like shadows they came and went, leaving no trace upon his consciousness, save that of a great mental fatigue. Yet Kull was not tired. There was a longing in him for things beyond himself and beyond the Valusian court. An unrest stirred in him and strange, luminous dreams roamed his soul. At his bidding there came to him Brule the Spear-slayer, warrior of Pictland, from the islands beyond the West.

"Lord king, you are tired of the life of the court. Come with me upon my galley and let us roam the tides for a space."

"Nay." Kull rested his chin

moodily upon his mighty hand. "I am weary beyond all these things. The cities hold no lure for me—and the borders are quiet. I hear no more the sea-songs I heard when I lay as a boy on the booming crags of Atlantis, and the night was alive with blazing stars. No more do the green woodlands beckon me as of old. There is a strangeness upon me and a longing beyond life's longings. Go!"

Brule went forth in a doubtful mood, leaving the king brooding upon his throne. Then to Kull stole a girl of the court and whispered:

"Great king, seek Tuzun Thune, the wizard. The secrets of life and death are his, and the stars in the sky and the lands beneath the seas."

Kull looked at the girl. Fine gold was her hair and her violet eyes were slanted strangely; she was beautiful, but her beauty meant little to Kull.

"Tuzun Thune," he repeated. "Who is he?"

"A wizard of the Elder Race. He lives here, in Valusia, by the Lake of Visions in the House of a Thousand Mirrors. All things are known to him, lord king; he speaks with the dead and holds converse with the demons of the Lost Lands."

Kull arose.

"I will seek out this mummer; but no word of my going, do you hear?"

"I am your slave, my lord." And she sank to her knees meekly, but the smile of her scarlet mouth was cunning behind Kull's back and the gleam of her narrow eyes was crafty.

KULL came to the house of Tuzun Thune, beside the Lake of Visions. Wide and blue stretched the waters of the lake and many a fine palace rose upon its banks; many swan-winged pleasure boats drifted lazily upon its hazy surface and evermore there came the sound of soft music.

Tall and spacious, but unpretentious, rose the House of a Thousand Mirrors. The great doors stood open and Kull ascended the broad stair and entered, unannounced. There in a great chamber, whose walls were of mirrors, he came upon Tuzun Thune, the wizard. The man was ancient as the hills of Zalgara; like wrinkled leather was his skin, but his cold gray eyes were like sparks of sword steel.

"Kull of Valusia, my house is yours," said he, bowing with old-time courtliness and motioning Kull to a throne-like chair.

"You are a wizard, I have heard," said Kull bluntly, resting his chin upon his hand and fixing his somber eyes upon the man's face. "Can you do wonders?"

The wizard stretched forth his hand; his fingers opened and closed like a bird's claws.

"Is that not a wonder—that this blind flesh obeys the thoughts of my mind? I walk, I breathe, I speak—are they all not wonders?"

Kull meditated awhile, then spoke. "Can you summon up demons?"

"Aye. I can summon up a demon more savage than any in ghostland—by smiting you in the face."

Kull started, then nodded. "But the dead, can you talk to the dead?"

"I talk with the dead always—as I am talking now. Death begins with birth and each man begins to die when he is born; even now you are dead, King Kull, because you were born."

"But you, you are older than men become; do wizards never die?"

"Men die when their time comes. No later, no sooner. Mine has not come."

Kull turned these answers over in his mind.

"Then it would seem that the greatest wizard of Valusia is no more than an ordinary man, and I have been duped in coming here."

Tuzun Thune shook his head. "Men are but men, and the greatest

men are they who soonest learn the simpler things. Nay, look into my mirrors, Kull."

The ceiling was a great many mirrors, and the walls were mirrors, perfectly jointed, yet many mirrors of many sizes and shapes.

"Mirrors are the world, Kull," droned the wizard. "Gaze into my mirrors and be wise."

Kull chose one at random and looked into it intently. The mirrors upon the opposite wall were reflected there, reflecting others, so that he seemed to be gazing down a long, luminous corridor, formed by mirror behind mirror; and far down this corridor moved a tiny figure. Kull looked long ere he saw that the figure was the reflection of himself. He gazed and a queer feeling of pettiness came over him; it seemed that that tiny figure was the true Kull, representing the real proportions of himself. So he moved away and stood before another.

"Look closely, Kull. That is the mirror of the past," he heard the wizard say.

Gray fogs obscured the vision, great billows of mist, ever heaving and changing like the ghost of a great river; through these fogs Kull caught swift fleeting visions of horror and strangeness; beasts and men moved there and shapes neither men nor beasts; great exotic blossoms glowed through the grayness; tall tropic trees towered high over reeking swamps, where reptilian monsters wallowed and bellowed; the sky was ghastly with flying dragons and the restless seas rocked and roared and beat endlessly along the muddy beaches. Man was not, yet man was the dream of the gods and strange were the nightmare forms that glided through the noisome jungles. Battle and onslaught were there, and frightful love. Death was there, for Life and Death go hand in hand. Across the slimy beaches of the world sounded the bellowing of the monsters, and incredible shapes loomed through the steaming curtain of the incessant rain.

"This is of the future."

Kull looked in silence.

"See you—what?"

"A strange world," said Kull heavily. "The Seven Empires are crumbled to dust and are forgotten. The restless green waves roar for many a fathom above the eternal hills of Atlantis; the mountains of Lemuria of the West are the islands of an unknown sea. Strange savages roam the elder lands and new lands flung strangely from the deeps, defiling the elder shrines. Valusia is vanished and all the nations of today; they of tomorrow are strangers. They know us not."

"Time strides onward," said Tuzun Thune calmly. "We live today; what care we for tomorrow—or yesterday? The Wheel turns and nations rise and fall; the world changes, and times return to savagery to rise again through the long ages. Ere Atlantis was, Valusia was, and ere Valusia was, the Elder Nations were. Aye, we, too, trampled the shoulders of lost tribes in our advance. You, who have come from the green sea hills of Atlantis to seize the ancient crown of Valusia, you think my tribe is old, we who held these lands ere the Valusians came out of the East, in the days before there were men in the sea lands. But men were here when the Elder Tribes rode out of the waste lands, and men before men, tribe before tribe. The nations pass and are forgotten, for that is the destiny of man."

"Yes," said Kull. "Yet is it not a pity that the beauty and glory of men should fade like smoke on a summer sea?"

"For what reason, since that is their destiny? I brood not over the lost glories of my race, nor do I labor for races to come. Live now,

Kull, live now. The dead are dead; the unborn are not. What matters men's forgetfulness of you when you have forgotten yourself in the silent worlds of death? Gaze in my mirrors and be wise."

Kull chose another mirror and gazed into it.

"That is the mirror of the deepest magic; what see ye, Kull?"

"Naught but myself."

"Look closely, Kull; is it in truth you?"

Kull stared into the great mirror, and the image that was his reflection returned his gaze.

"I come before this mirror," mused Kull, chin on fist, "and I bring this man to life. This is beyond my understanding, since first I saw him in the still waters of the lakes of Atlantis, till I saw him again in the gold-rimmed mirrors of Valusia. He is I, a shadow of myself, part of myself—I can bring him into being or slay him at my will; yet"—he halted, strange thoughts whispering through the vast dim recesses of his mind like shadowy bats flying through a great cavern—"yet where is he when I stand not in front of a mirror? May it be in man's power thus lightly to form and destroy a shadow of life and existence? How do I know that when I step back from the mirror he vanishes into the void of Naught?

"Nay, by Valka, am I the man or is he? Which of us is the ghost of the other? Mayhap these mirrors are but windows through which we look into another world. Does he think the same of me? Am I no more than a shadow, a reflection of himself—to him, as he to me? And if I am the ghost, what sort of a world lives upon the other side of this mirror? What armies ride there and what kings rule? This world is all I know. Knowing naught of any other, how can I judge? Surely there are green hills there and booming seas and wide plains where men ride to battle. Tell me, wizard who are wiser than most men, tell me, are there worlds beyond our worlds?"

"A man has eyes, let him see," answered the wizard. "Who would see must first believe."

THE hours drifted by and Kull still sat before the mirrors of Tuzun Thune, gazing into that which depicted himself. Sometimes it seemed that he gazed upon hard shallowness; at other times gigantic depths seemed to loom before him. Like the surface of the sea was the mirror of Tuzun Thune; hard as the sea in the sun's slanting beams, in the darkness of the stars, when no eye can pierce her deeps; vast and mystic as the sea when the sun smites her in such way that the watcher's breath is caught at the glimpse of tremendous abysses. So was the mirror in which Kull gazed.

At last the king rose with a sigh and took his departure still wondering. And Kull came again to the House of a Thousand Mirrors; day after day he came and sat for hours before the mirror. The eyes looked out at him, identical with his, yet Kull seemed to sense a difference—a reality that was not of him. Hour upon hour he would stare with strange intensity into the mirror; hour after hour the image gave back his gaze.

The business of the palace and of the council went neglected. The people murmured; Kull's stallion stamped restlessly in his stable and Kull's warriors diced and argued aimlessly with one another. Kull heeded not. At times he seemed on the point of discovering some vast, unthinkable secret. He no longer thought of the image in the mirror as a shadow of himself; the thing, to him, was an entity, similar in outer appearance, yet basically as far from Kull himself as the poles

are far apart. The image, it seemed to Kull, had an individuality apart from Kull's; he was no more dependent on Kull than Kull was dependent on him. And day by day Kull doubted in which world he really lived; was he the shadow, summoned at will by the other? Did he instead of the other live in a world of delusion, the shadow of the real world?

Kull began to wish that he might enter the personality beyond the mirror for a space, to see what might be seen; yet should he manage to go beyond that door could he ever return? Would he find a world identical with the one in which he moved? A world, of which his was but a ghostly reflection? Which was reality and which illusion?

At times Kull halted to wonder how such thoughts and dreams had come to enter his mind and at times he wondered if they came of his own volition or—here his thoughts would become mazed. His meditations were his own; no man ruled his thoughts and he would summon them at his pleasure; yet could he? Were they not as bats, coming and going, not at his pleasure but at the bidding or ruling of—of whom? The gods? The Women who wove the webs of Fate? Kull could come to no conclusion, for at each mental step he became more and more bewildered in a hazy gray fog of illusory assertions and refutations. This much he knew: that strange visions entered his mind, like bats flying unbidden from the whispering void of non-existence; never had he thought these thoughts, but now they ruled his mind, sleeping and waking, so that he seemed to walk in a daze at times; and his sleep was fraught with strange, monstrous dreams.

"Tell me, wizard," he said, sitting before the mirror, eyes fixed intently upon his image, "how can I pass yon door? For of a truth, I am not sure that that is the real world and this the shadow; at least, that which I see must exist in some form."

"See and believe," droned the wizard. "Man must believe to accomplish. Form is shadow, substance is illusion, materiality is dream; man is because he believes he is; what is man but a dream of the gods? Yet man can be that which he wishes to be; form and substance, they are but shadows. The mind, the ego, the essence of the god-dream—that is real, that is immortal. See and believe, if you would accomplish, Kull."

The king did not fully understand; he never fully understood the enigmatical utterances of the wizard, yet they struck somewhere in his being a dim responsive chord. So day after day he sat before the mirrors of Tuzun Thune. Ever the wizard lurked behind him like a shadow.

THEN came a day when Kull seemed to catch glimpses of strange lands; there flitted across his consciousness dim thoughts and recognitions. Day by day he had seemed to lose touch with the world; all things had seemed each succeeding day more ghostly and unreal; only the man in the mirror seemed like reality. Now Kull seemed to be close to the doors of some mightier worlds; giant vistas gleamed fleetingly; the fogs of unreality thinned; "form is shadow, substance is illusion; they are but shadows" sounded as if from some far country of his consciousness. He remembered the wizard's words and it seemed to him that now he almost understood—form and substance, could not he change himself at will, if he knew the master key that opened this door? What worlds within what worlds awaited the bold explorer?

The man in the mirror seemed

smiling at him—closer, closer—a fog enwrapped all and the reflection dimmed suddenly—Kull knew a sensation of fading, of change, of merging——

"Kull!" the yell split the silence into a million vibratory fragments!

Mountains crashed and worlds tottered as Kull, hurled back by that frantic shout, made a superhuman effort, how or why he did not know.

A crash, and Kull stood in the room of Tuzun Thune before a shattered mirror, mazed and half blind with bewilderment. There before him lay the body of Tuzun Thune, whose time had come at last, and above him stood Brule the Spear-slayer, sword dripping red and eyes wide with a kind of horror.

"Valka!" swore the warrior. "Kull, it was time I came!"

"Aye, yet what happened?" The king groped for words.

"Ask this traitress," answered the Spear-slayer, indicating a girl who crouched in terror before the king; Kull saw that it was she who first sent him to Tuzun Thune. "As I came in I saw you fading into yon mirror as smoke fades into the sky, by Valka! Had I not seen I would not have believed—you had almost vanished when my shout brought you back."

"Aye," muttered Kull, "I had almost gone beyond the door that time."

"This fiend wrought most craftily," said Brule. "Kull, do you not now see how he spun and flung over you a web of magic? Kaanuub of Blaal plotted with this wizard to do away with you, and this wench, a girl of Elder Race, put the thought in your mind so that you would come here. Kananu of the council learned of the plot today; I know not what you saw in that mirror, but with it Tuzun Thune enthralled your soul and almost by his witchery he changed your body to mist——"

"Aye." Kull was still mazed. "But being a wizard, having knowledge of all the ages and despising gold, glory and position, what could Kaanuub offer Tuzun Thune that would make of him a foul traitor?"

"Gold, power and position," grunted Brule. "The sooner you learn that men are men whether wizard, king or thrall, the better you will rule, Kull. Now what of her?"

"Naught, Brule," as the girl whimpered and groveled at Kull's feet. "She was but a tool. Rise, child, and go your ways; none shall harm you."

Alone with Brule, Kull looked for the last time on the mirrors of Tuzun Thune.

"Mayhap he plotted and conjured, Brule; nay, I doubt you not, yet—was it his witchery that was changing me to thin mist, or had I stumbled on a secret? Had you not brought me back, had I faded in dissolution or had I found worlds beyond this?"

Brule stole a glance at the mirrors, and twitched his shoulders as if he shuddered. "Aye. Tuzun Thune stored the wisdom of all the hells here. Let us begone, Kull, ere they bewitch me, too."

"Let us go, then," answered Kull, and side by side they went forth from the House of a Thousand Mirrors—where, mayhap, are prisoned the souls of men.

NONE look now in the mirrors of Tuzun Thune. The pleasure boats shun the shore where stands the wizard's house and no one goes in the house or to the room where Tuzun Thune's dried and withered carcass lies before the mirrors of illusion. The place is shunned as a place accursed, and though it stands for a thousand years to come, no footsteps shall echo there. Yet Kull upon his throne meditates often upon the strange wisdom and untold

secrets hidden there and wonders. . . .

For there are worlds beyond worlds, as Kull knows, and whether the wizard bewitched him by words or by mesmerism, vistas did open to the king's gaze beyond that strange door, and Kull is less sure of reality since he gazed into the mirrors of Tuzun Thune.

Folks Used to Believe

by ALVIN F. HARLOW

The Salamander

IN THE streams of the United States are found lizard-like creatures—usually only a few inches in length, but in the rivers often reaching a foot or more—which are variously called water-dogs, hell-benders, mud-puppies and other names; but naturalists call them salamanders. They are the modern types of those ancient fabulous lizards which could pass unhurt through fire. Some of the little salamanders found in our springs and caves are even spotted just as those fireproof ones were.

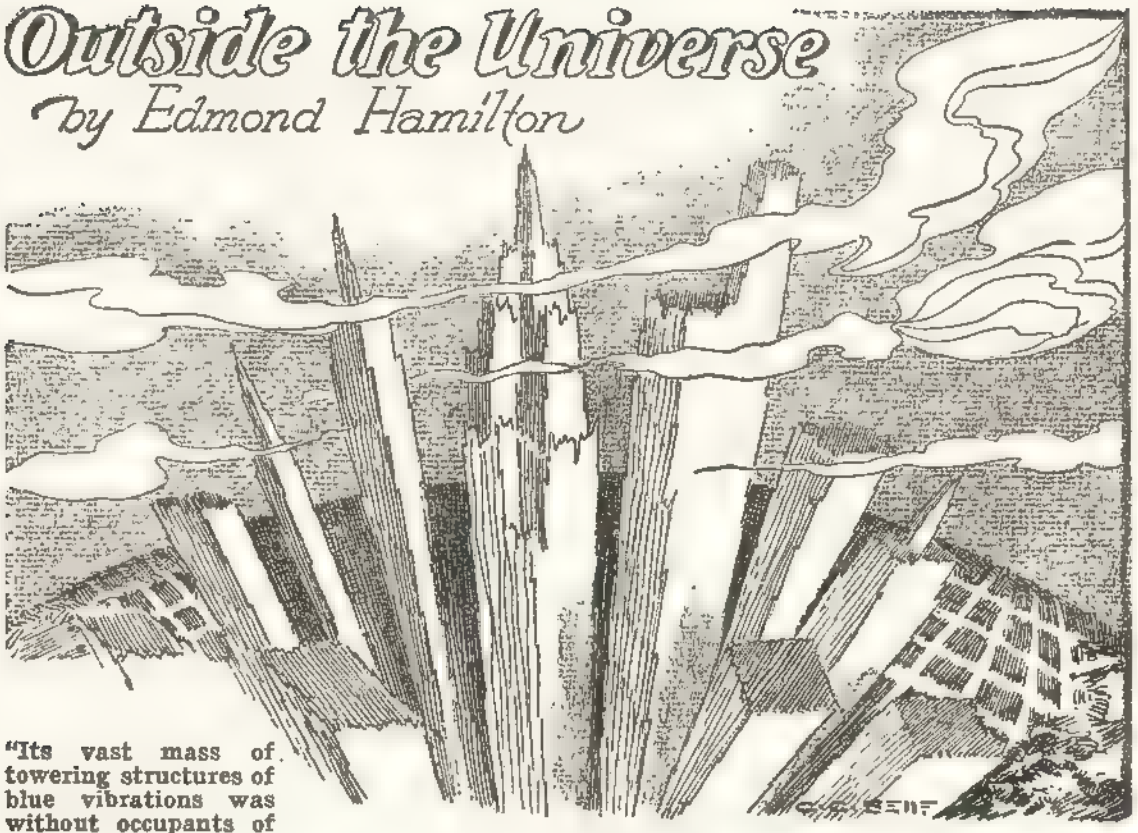
A Roman writer of nearly 2,000 years ago said that the salamander's body was "starred," or spotted all over. "It is so intensely cold," he goes on, "that it extinguishes fire by its contact, in the same way that ice does. It spits forth a milky matter from its mouth; and whatever part of the human body is touched with this, all hair falls off and the part assumes the appearance of leprosy."

The salamander was said to have no sex, either male or female, but was produced by some other animal. Writers differed as to what animal did this. A zoologist of only 200 years ago still believed in the myth, though in modified form. "One Part of its Skin," said he, "is exceeding black and the other yellow; both very bright and glittering, with a black Line all along the Back where those Spots are, out of which, as some Writers say, a certain Liquor or Humour proceeds, which quencheth the Heat of Fire when it is in the same. These animals are bred in the Alps and some parts of Germany, in marshy, wet Places; and are said to be cold as Ice. . The vulgar Notion that a Salamander can live in and not be burnt by Fire is without any Foundation of Truth, for the Experiment has been tried, and the Salamander was consumed to Ashes. The Truth is, as long as the Humour before mentioned runs, the Fire can not hurt it; but when that Moisture is dried up, the Fire consumes the Salamander, and that instantly. The Bite of this Creature is very deadly and fatal. It is a saying in France that a Man bit by a Salamander should have as many Physicians to cure him as the Salamander has spots."

There seems also to have been an ancient belief in a Nature-spirit called salamander which lived in fire, even as three other Nature-spirits, the sylph lived in and represented the air, the undine the water, and the gnome the earth, respectively.

Outside the Universe

by Edmond Hamilton



"Its vast mass of towering structures of blue vibrations was without occupants of any kind."

The Story Thus Far

A FLEET of serpent-people from a dying universe wipe out the Interstellar Patrol, establish a base on the worlds in the Cancer cluster, and capture the space-ship sent out under command of Dur Nal to ask help from the Andromeda universe. While the serpent-people perfect their huge death-beam, with which they plan to wipe out all life from our universe, Dur Nal and his crew escape from the serpent-universe and speed out toward the Andromeda at millions of light-speeds, pursued by the serpent-fleet.

10. Flight and Pursuit

"THROUGH the vibration-wall!" I cried, as our ship raced out at utmost speed. "Out of the serpent-universe—and we may yet get to the Andromeda universe in time!"

The eyes of Jhul Din and Korus Kan were as aflame with excitement as my own, at that moment, and from beneath came the triumphant shouts of our followers. There remained of the latter hardly more than a bare score, I knew—few enough to handle the great ship, but the control and operation of it were so simple that by standing alternate watches we could hold our course through space. Briefly I explained this to Korus Kan, he nodding assent, when from Jhul Din there came a cry that caused both of us to spin around toward him in swift alarm. The big Spican's eyes were fixed upon the space-chart above, and as we turned he raised an arm toward it.

"The five hundred serpent-ships!" he cried. "They've come out through the great wall too—*they're after us!*"

The blood in my veins seemed to chill with sudden renewal of our former tenseness and terror, as on the space-chart we saw, racing out after us from the dying universe, the five hundred-odd serpent-ships that had risen from the giant central world to pursue us, and that now, undeterred by the fate of the ten ships we had

This story began in WEIRD TALES for July

lured to destruction, were speeding out into the great void after us. Moments they had been delayed, apparently, by the confusion and chaos there in the opening between the space-forts, but though in those moments we had flashed far ahead their close-massed ships came on after us at their topmost speed—a great pursuit that they were carrying out into the void between the universes!

"They'll pursue us to the bitter end!" I exclaimed, my eyes on the chart. "They'll go to any length rather than let us get to the Andromeda universe!"

I wheeled about, my eyes seeking our speed-dials. Already we were traveling through the void at our own highest velocity, a full ten million light-speeds, but the shining mass of the Andromeda universe seemed infinitely distant in the blackness ahead, with that swift, relentless pursuit behind us. A moment more and Jhul Din strode out of the pilot room down to the great, throbbing generators beneath, striving to gain from them a fraction more of speed. For now was beginning, we knew, the most bitter of all chases, a stern chase with vast abysses of space lying between us and the universe that was our goal, and with the five hundred flying craft of the serpent-creatures close behind.

On—on—moment after moment, hour after dragging hour, our ship hummed through the awful void, flashing with each moment through countless millions of miles of the infinity of blackness and emptiness that lay about us, with the half-thousand ships of the serpent-creatures coming grimly on behind. The far-flung, dim-glowing dying universe behind us glowed even dimmer, diminishing in extent, too, as we shot onward, while before us the shining disk-mass of the Andromeda universe shone ever more brightly; yet it was with a terrifying slowness that that disk largened as we flashed toward it. Tensely I stood with Korus Kan in the pilot room, gazing toward it, and even then could not but reflect upon what a strange spectacle it would all have presented to any observer who could have seen it: a spectacle of one mighty ship pursued by a half-thousand, as it raced through the void from one universe to another, manned by a score of dissimilar beings drawn from the stars of still a third universe, and carrying with them its fate.

But it was with dark enough thoughts, as our ship flashed on for hour upon hour, that I myself contemplated the three universes that lay before and behind and beside us. Before us the Andromeda universe was shining in ever-increasing size and brilliance with each hour that we raced toward it; but what, I wondered,would we find in that universe even were we able to escape the swift and terrible pursuit behind? Was there any chance of finding in it, in the race that held sway over its suns and worlds, the help that could save our galaxy? Was it not possible that even were we able to reach it we would be treated by that race as merely other strangers and invaders from an alien universe?

My eyes swung, too, toward the far little glow of light in the blackness to our left, a patch of misty light that seemed very tiny in the stupendous blackness and emptiness of space that lay about it. Yet my mind's eye, leaping out across the terrific abysses that separated us from it, could see that little light-patch as it was, could make out the throngs of blazing stars that formed it—our galaxy, the giant suns and smaller stars and thronging, far-swinging worlds through which we had roamed with the ships of the Interstellar Patrol. And I could see it as it would be now, convulsed with panic fear, as from their great base of the Cancer cluster the vanguard of the serpent-invaders spread terror and destruction out over the neigh-

boring suns, preparing the way for the mighty host of invaders that was to follow.

But it was when I turned, glancing back to where the dying universe of the serpent-people glowed dim and ominous behind us, decreasing steadily in size as we flashed from it, that my mood was darkest. In that mighty mass of dead and dying suns, I knew, there on the giant world that turned between that central triplet of great, dying suns, the serpent-races were completing their plans, were preparing to launch themselves across the void toward my own universe. Already their vast fleet of tens of thousands of ships was all but complete, and soon would be completed, too, that gigantic death-beam projector whose awful power no force could ever withstand. Our only chance of preventing the descent of that vast horde and their terrible weapon upon our galaxy was to reach the Andromeda universe and procure there, somehow, the aid with which we might return and crush the serpent-people in their own dying universe. And had we a chance even to reach the Andromeda universe, with the half-thousand craft of our serpent-pursuers driving relentlessly on our track?

In the hours that followed, it was as though all else had ceased to exist, so centered were our minds upon that remorseless pursuit. On and on we flashed, our throbbing, beating generators flinging us through the void with their utmost power, but behind came the serpent-ships at their topmost speed, too, and though for forty-eight hours we had raced through space we had covered hardly a third of the distance to the Andromeda universe. As I raised my eyes to the space-chart then, toward our single ship-dot and the swarm of dots behind it, a sharp, cold thrill ran through me. For now I saw that the gap of a few inches that separated us from them on the chart had lessened a little, the swarm drawing noticeably closer toward our single ship-dot. A moment I stared up at the chart in stunned silence; then, with realization, a cry broke from me.

"The serpent-ships!" I cried. *"They're overtaking us!"*

My cry brought Jhul Din back up into the pilot room, and standing together with eyes riveted upon the space-chart we saw clearly that with every moment, slowly but steadily, the serpent-ships behind were drawing nearer, though we were moving at our utmost speed. Our ship, battered and worn by its tremendous flight through the void from universe to universe, and by the space-fights it had come through, was a fraction slower than the new ships of our pursuers, and that fraction of difference in speed, we saw, was bringing them closer upon us with each passing minute. Yet there was a chance still, we knew, to gain the Andromeda universe before they overtook us; so still at utmost velocity we flashed on, toward the shining universe ahead.

On—on—the hours that followed, while we drove through the awful void with the serpent-ships behind closing slowly and inexorably in upon us, live in my memory only as a strange period of ceaseless, rushing flight, with our eyes always upon the space-chart and upon the brilliant disk-mass of light ahead. Twice we flashed through the outskirts of great heat-regions glowing there in the void, and once past the edge of one of the deadly areas of radio-active vibrations, but ever after passing them our ship swung back toward the universe ahead. That universe, as we hummed on hour upon hour, was changing from a glowing disk of light into a great mass of individual points of light, into a gigantic mass of stars that loomed in greater radiant splendor before us with each passing hour. Green and red and yellow and blue

suns we could glimpse among its thronging thousands, and others still white-hot with youth, shining with ever greater brilliance as we drove through the void toward them.

Before us the great universe lay in all its true gigantic glory, when we had covered two-thirds of the distance to it, but by that time our eyes were not upon it at all, but upon the space-chart and the black void behind us; since in the intervening hours the serpent-ships had crept ever closer toward us, their swarm on the space-chart less than an inch behind our racing ship-dot. Even that little gap, in the hours that followed, was lessening, closing, while we three in the pilot room watched it in tense silence. At last, with the blazing mass of suns of the Andromeda universe stretched across the heavens but a dozen hours ahead, we saw that the serpent-swarm on the chart was all but touching our single ship-dot, saw that the end at last was at hand.

"They'll overhaul us in less than an hour!" exclaimed Jhul Din. "We'll never even reach the Andromeda universe!"

To his outburst we made no answer, gazing in silence up at the big space-chart, watching doom creep upon us. The serpent-swarm had crept still farther upon us until its foremost dots seemed touching our own ship-dot, its foremost racing craft in reach of our own. Then, gazing through the rear distance-windows that projected from the pilot room's sides, the big Spican uttered a low exclamation, pointing mutely backward as we turned toward him. And as we gazed we saw, far behind us there in the lightless void, a swarm of close-massed light-points that steadily was largening, was drawing nearer toward us, toward our doom. For it was the end, I knew. We had escaped death in a hundred forms in the last days, but this we could not escape, for with the Andromeda universe still hours away our chance of escape was gone. Dodge and turn as we might, they would corner us, would hem us in; and though we might destroy one or two of their half-thousand ships, by no miracle could we hope to escape the rest. For a moment a deathly silence held us as we stared back toward those nearing light-points, and then I whirled around to the order-tube.

"Battle-positions—all of the crew to the ray-tubes!" I shouted, and as I turned back to the other two I cried to them, "We'll let some of them feel our rays before they end us!"

I heard Jhul Din shout his approval, saw Korus Kan's eyes burning as he glanced back toward our pursuers, heard from beneath the cries of our crew as they took up their positions at the ray-tubes, ready to smite a last blow at our enemies before they overwhelmed us. Behind us in the blackness the onrushing serpent-ships had grown from light-points to great dark oval shapes with white-lit pilot rooms at their noses, the score of great disk attraction-ships racing on among them. Ever closer they were leaping, and I knew that in a moment more those disk-ships would be near enough to grasp us, would glow with attractive force and hold us helpless while the death-beams of the fighting-ships swept us. But as we tensely waited for the end, still flashing on at our own full speed, there was a sharp cry from Korus Kan, and we wheeled toward him to find him regarding the pilot room's walls with eyes suddenly alight with new hope.

"It's another radio-active vibration region!" he cried, pointing toward the walls and controls that were beginning to flicker out with the strange, fluorescent light we had always dreaded. "If we plunge straight into it there's a chance we can shake off the pursuit!"

I caught my breath at the suggestion but in an instant saw that he was right, that though we might meet

death amid the disintegrating vibrations, we might perhaps escape and throw off our pursuers, from whom death was certain as things were.

"It's a chance!" I exclaimed. "Head straight into the radio-active region, Korus Kan!"

He glanced swiftly at the instruments before him, swerved our racing ship a little to the right, and then walls and floor and mechanisms about us were glowing with ever-waxing misty light as we drove in toward the great region's heart. I felt the same tingling force flooding through me that I had already once experienced, as our flying ship raced on, again swaying and spinning as it flashed through the mighty ether-currents whose meeting and collision formed the great region of vibrations about us, though outside was only the same blackness as before. With every moment, though, our ship, our mechanisms, our own bodies, were glowing with waxing light, while in the darkness behind I saw that the great swarm of ships racing after us was itself aglow now with light, as it, too, rushed into the great radio-active region after us. And still, with a courage that matched our own desperation, they were speeding after and closer to us, undeterred even by the crumbling death that flooded space all about them and us now.

Glowing ship and glowing bodies, force that rapidly was overcoming us with a dizzy nausea and that was crumbling the walls and machinery about us, the gathered suns of the Andromeda universe far ahead and the glowing half-thousand pursuing ships just behind—all these were but a mad chaos in our minds as we reeled on, farther and farther into the mighty radio-active region. I heard even above the roaring of our generators a clatter of falling metal somewhere toward the ship's rear, while even about us the walls and all else were crumbling, like sugar in water, glowing and disintegrating, as our whole ship was beginning to break up. Now, too, as the great swarm of ships behind raced ever closer a score or more of their number had drawn level with us, on our right, attaining that position by slanting in to cut us off when we had swerved in toward the radio-active region. And as pursued and pursuers raced on, all glowing and disintegrating alike, that score of ships to our right was pressing ever closer toward us.

Nearer they came, and then from their glowing ships toward our own stabbed the pale death-beams, sweeping about us as we flashed on, a shining mark. As they did so, though, our own red shafts burned out swiftly, two of those attacking ships flaring to nothingness beneath them, while with a swift turn to the left Korus Kan had avoided the pale beams. That turn, though, took us now every moment outward once more from the radio-active region's center, forcing us out once more into clear space where the serpent-ships could annihilate us without danger to themselves. Out and out we flashed, and though our ship and all in it still glowed with the fluorescent light, that glow was waning, and the clang of falling metal from beneath, from the ship's disintegrating sides had ceased. Out—out—the score of ships to our right joining with the greater mass behind us again, and all drawing closer toward us, until the tingling nausea that had filled us had vanished, the glowing light of our ships and theirs vanishing likewise. Then, in one great mass, they were leaping again upon us.

Our lives at last within their grasp, they flashed after us and toward us, and I knew that an instant more would see them about us, their death-beams striking at us from all around as they encircled us. I gazed ahead for a moment, to where the giant universe of Andromeda stretched like a great rampart of burning suns across the black, cold heavens, still

hours away from us, and then gazed back to where the close-massed hundreds of serpent-ships leapt after and upon us, the death-beam tubes in their sides already swinging toward us. Then in me, at that instant of onrushing doom, there flamed up a strange, wild rage, a fierce, utter fury that had grown in me during all the struggles and flights that had been ours since first we had met these serpent-creatures. I wheeled around to Jhul Din and Korus Kan, my anger breaking from me in a fiery shout.

"Turn the ship square around and halt, Korus Kan!" I cried. "We of the Interstellar Patrol are not going to be picked off as we run—we're going to turn and face them head-on!"

Korus Kan's eyes flamed at my cry, his hands moved swiftly on the controls, and then our ship had curved suddenly about and had slowed and stopped, swinging around and hanging motionless in space, facing our enemies. Even as we had curved and stopped, they too had swiftly halted, as though suspicious for the moment of some trap, and hung before us in the black gulf of space, facing us. Then there was an instant of utter stillness and silence, as there in the void we faced them, our ship motionless in space, we three in the pilot room gazing toward their own great swarm of ships hanging motionless before us; the mighty Andromeda universe flaming in the heavens behind us, now, and the far, dim glow of the dying serpent-universe in the blackness ahead, and the misty little circle of light that was our own galaxy away to the right; all these lay about us in a silence that was the silence of doom. For a single moment the great tableau held, and then, disdaining to use their attraction-ships upon us now, the great swarm of serpent-ships leapt as one toward us, their hundreds of death-beams stabbing toward us!

But as they did so, as they sprang upon us there in space, there leapt from above and *behind* us a mighty swarm of other ships—long, slender, flat, gleaming ships entirely different from the oval-shaped serpent-craft, or even from the cigarlike ships of our own galaxy—long, flat ships like none we had ever seen before, that flashed down over and past us straight upon the serpent-fleet! From the sides of these strange new ships there projected thick, squat cylinders that were pointed now toward the serpent-ships before us, and though no ray or beam could be seen issuing from those cylinders, the serpent-ships at which they were aimed were crumpling, were contracting and folding up into shapeless masses of crumpled metal, as though crushed in the grasp of a giant hand! And as that mighty swarm of strange, flat ships flashed down upon the serpent-fleet that reeled back and recoiled from its terrific blows, I heard a wild cry from Korus Kan, as he and Jhul Din stared out with me.

"Strange ships attacking our pursuers!" he cried. "They're ships that have come out from the Andromeda universe to save us from the serpent-creatures' pursuit!"

11. Into the Andromeda Universe

As the mighty swarm of Andromeda ships from behind us drove down upon the half-thousand serpent-craft ahead, I could only stare for a moment in stupefied surprize, so stunning had been our sudden transition from death to deliverance. I saw the long, flat craft of the Andromedans, a full thousand in number, flashing down on the serpent-ships in one great swoop, saw the latter, in groups, in dozens, in scores, crumpling and constricting as the deadly cylinders of the Andromedan ships were turned toward them. Within an instant, it seemed, a full two hundred of the half-thousand serpent-ships had

crumpled and whirled away beneath the terrible, invisible force of the cylinders, though death-beams were raging out thickly all about the swooping Andromedan ships. Then, with almost half their fleet wiped out, the remaining three hundred serpent-ships, including their score of great disk-attraction ships, had whirled around and were racing back into space toward their own dying universe, fleeing from the terrific blows of the attacking ships that had come out from the Andromeda universe ahead, just in time to save us.

Now, as the serpent-fleet flashed from sight, into the void toward its own universe, the thousand Andromedan ships massed swiftly and moved toward our own, that hung still motionless there in the gulf of space. In tense silence we watched them come, hoping that they might not set us down, too, as enemies because of our serpent-ship, but they turned none of their deadly cylinders toward us. Those cylinders, as I was later to learn, were in reality projectors that shot forth a shaft of invisible force, one that caused the ether about any ship it struck to compress about that ship instantly with terrific force, compressing thus into small compass the ether-vibrations that were the matter of the ship, and thus crumpling that matter itself, in an instant. It was a weapon fully as terrible as the crimson destruction-rays of our galaxy's ships or the pale death-beams of the serpent-creatures, a shaft of crumpling force that we knew could destroy us instantly. Instead of loosing it upon us, though, they slanted down until one of their foremost ships was hanging just above our own.

We guessed then that they meant to enter our ship, and in a moment our guess was confirmed as the long, flat ship hovering above sank downward until its lower surface was lying along the upper surface of our own oval craft, the two touching. Then we heard a section of the underside of the ship above sliding back, and a moment later, at my order, one of our crew slid open our own upper space-door. The openings in the two ships, in the upper side of ours and the lower side of theirs, were thus together, pressed so closely by the weight of the upper ship as it pressed down upon us that it formed a hermetically sealed opening connecting the two. Then, down through that opening from the ship above, down into the corridor of our ship and toward our pilot room, there came a half-dozen of the Andromedans from the ship above us, a half-dozen of the people of the Andromeda universe.

I do not know what weird and alien shapes we had expected to see in these beings of a different universe, but I do know that never had our imaginations envisaged creatures of so utterly strange a nature as these that came toward us now. For they were *gaseous!* Tall columns of misty green gas, that held always to the same pillar-like outline, as unchanging of form as though of solid flesh, and that were gliding along the corridor toward us! Upright, unchanging columns of green, opaque vapor, from near the top of whose six feet of height there branched out on each side a smaller arm of the same thick green gas, arms that they moved at will, and in which some of them held instruments and weapons! Tall, erect columns of thick, green vapor, without features of any kind that we could see, that yet were living, intelligent and powerful beings like ourselves! Their bodies, their two arms, their very organs and features and senses formed of gas, just as our bodies are solid, and that of a jelly-fish liquid!

Down the corridor they came toward us, gliding smoothly forward, halting just before us and surveying us, I knew, by whatever strange sense of sight was within their gaseous bodies. Dumbly we stared toward them, for the first time now wholly

appreciating the immense difference between us and them; then, at a loss for another gesture, I held out my hand toward the foremost of them. Instantly his own arm came out toward me, gripped my hand with a grip as solid as though that arm had been of flesh instead of gas, a grasp that though cold was real and tangible. When the one before me had withdrawn his grasp, then I spoke aloud to him, but there came no reply. Instead the Andromedan extended toward me, in the grasp of his other arm, a small globe of what seemed misty glass, a few inches in diameter and mounted upon a little metal base. As he held it, though, pressing a tiny button in the base, the misty globe suddenly glowed with light, and then in it I could see figures moving, as though in some tiny cinema-screen.

The scene in it was that of a great, gleaming-walled room, utterly strange in appearance, with a mass of shining, unfamiliar apparatus grouped about it, among which moved a dozen or more Andromedans like those before me, upright columns of green gas gliding to and fro, inspecting and tending the different mechanisms. Then all of them grouped about a single one, a vast tube that I sensed was a great telescope, which pointed out into the blackness of space, and down from which there fell upon a broad white surface a swift-moving picture, one of a single oval spaceship rushing through the void, with Korus Kan, Jhul Din and myself visible in its white-lit pilot room, while not far behind it there raced in pursuit of it a great swarm of serpent-manned ships. Then the Andromedans grouped about that great telescope were seen moving swiftly over to an apparatus at the room's center, apparently one of communication; and the next moment the whole scene had vanished, and was replaced by one of a thousand long, flat ships—Andromedan ships—slanting swiftly upward from a great world and into space. Then that, too, had clicked off; there was a flashing scene of those same thousand ships leaping upon our pursuers as they had done but a moment before; then all light in the little instrument had vanished as the Andromedan before me snapped off its control button.

A MOMENT we remained in silence, puzzled, until Korus Kan broke the stillness with an exclamation. "It's a communication instrument, Dur Nal," he exclaimed, "one that shows in visible pictures the thoughts of whoever it is connected to—it's their method of communication with each other, apparently."

I nodded now, with sudden understanding. "Then that's the way that they discovered our peril—came to save us!" I said. "That's what they're telling us!"

But now the Andromedan had held the little instrument forward to me, and as I took it, in some perplexity, he silently indicated two little round metal plates inset on its bottom, which he had grasped when holding the thing and which I now grasped in turn, pressing the tiny control button as I did so. The next instant a current of thrilling force seemed racing up my arms, through my brain, and in the little glowing sphere appeared only a confusion of vague forms. Then, as my brain cleared, I concentrated my thoughts on our mission and its reason; and at once, in the instrument's glowing sphere, there appeared clearly the five thousand serpent-ships attacking our universe, destroying our fleet by means of their death-beams and attraction-ships, settling upon the worlds and suns of the Cancer cluster. Then, with the shifting of my thoughts, there was a glimpse of our ship flashing out into the void from our own universe toward that of the Androm-

eda, and then the little sphere had gone black as I snapped off the button that controlled it.

For the moment we could not know whether we had been fully understood by the beings before us, but the next instant one of them pointed with a gaseous limb toward the gathered suns of the Andromeda universe, flaring in the blackness ahead, and as we nodded and pointed also, they stepped over beside us. The next moment the opening in the under side of the ship above and the space-door in our own ship had clanged shut, and as the whole great fleet of ships about us began to move toward the Andromeda universe, Korus Kan opened up the power of our own generators, moving smoothly along among them. Within moments more, the strange, gaseous forms of the Andromedans standing there beside us, our ship and all those about it were flashing at full speed toward the great galaxy ahead.

From the ship's hull beneath I could hear an odd, grating sound, as of the clash of metal on metal, that continued to come to my ears as we flashed on, but in the moments, the hours that followed, I paid but small attention to it, engrossed as we all were in the magnificent spectacle of the universe ahead. Like a tremendous belt of suns across the black heavens it was, largening in vastness and brilliance with every moment that we flashed nearer, until by the time we had raced toward it for a half-score of hours it seemed to fill all the firmament before us with its hosts of flaming stars. We were flashing on in the same course as the ships about us, heading toward a spot where there shone two great yellow suns that were like twin wardens of this mighty universe. And as we hummed through the void toward them, sweeping in nearer to this great galaxy's edge, the ships about us and our own ship, too, had begun to slacken their tremendous speed, until at last at a reduced velocity we were driving in past the outmost suns of the Andromeda universe.

The dull grating sound from beneath was persisting, still, but now interest in all else had left me as there spread before and about me the wonders of this stupendous universe. A universe it was as large as our own, as large as the dying serpent-universe, but different from either. For if ours was a young universe, with the majority of our stars glowing with blue and white-hot youth, and the serpent-universe an aged and dying one, with burned-out and waning crimson suns, this one before us was a universe in its prime—a universe the vast majority of whose suns were flaming yellow with their greatest splendor, a golden galaxy of living stars infinitely different from the dim, dying universe from which we had just escaped, and infinitely different, too, from the giant, white young suns and raw, vast nebulæ of our own youthful universe.

As we sped in between those gathered, flaming suns, though, as we drove in past the edge of their great mass, my eyes began to take in their position and arrangement, and as they did so I saw that not alone in age or youthfulness was this universe different from any other I had seen. For as we flashed into the thronging suns, past a great group of them massed to our right, I saw that the suns of that group were gathered in a great circle, a score of mighty flaming suns, each set in position with mathematical exactness, forming a perfect circle as they hung here in space, one of the two great yellow suns I had glimpsed from afar having a place in that circle. And inside that mighty circle of suns I glimpsed a vast mass of swarming planets—hundreds, thousands even, of great, turning worlds that moved in regular orbits inside the great ring of suns about them, lit and warmed perpetually by their encircling fires.

Stupefied, stunned, by that tremendous sight, I did not, could not, for the moment understand the significance of what I was seeing. But as we flashed on past the great circle and its swarming enclosed planets, as we approached another close group of suns, I saw that it, too, was formed of a score or more of great suns grouped in a perfect circle like the first, and that inside that circle of suns there swung also hundreds and thousands of whirling worlds! And beyond it shone another mighty ring of suns, and another, and others, as far as the eye could reach, all the suns in all this tremendous universe being grouped by the score into great circles inside of which swung countless planets! And then, at last, there broke upon my reeling brain the meaning of what I was seeing.

"Suns in circles!" I cried, as I gazed out across that mighty vista. "They've done this themselves—consciously, deliberately! They've placed all the suns of their universe in great circle-groups, so that inside those circles their countless peoples can exist!"

For I saw, now, that it was so, that only by intelligent design could the countless swarms of thronging suns about us ever have been placed in these mathematically perfect circles, inside which their great planets swung. Long ago their universe must have been much like our own, a great chaos of suns reeling blindly in all directions, swarming like a vast hive of stars, each with its own few planets moving about it. But as their numbers had increased, as they had come to need every world, every planet for their existence, they had grasped their suns with titanic, unguessable forces, had swung them from their accustomed chaos into order, into great circles, placing inside those circles all their countless worlds—worlds of which thousands could then exist upon the light and heat of a mere score of suns by having those suns grouped in a ring about them.

Now, driving in past great circle after circle of flaming suns, past the countless planets that moved inside those circles, we were flashing on with the ships about us toward the center of this strange and mighty universe. On our space-chart I could see that thick about us were great masses of interstellar traffic, which cleared away before us as we drove inward. Circle after circle of fiery suns we were leaving behind, mass upon mass of swarming planets inside, but never on our space-charts showed any wandering dark-stars, or meteor-swarms, or vagabond, sunless worlds, all matter in this universe apparently having been swept up by the Andromedans and used as habitations for their races, inside the great sun-circles. A gigantic mass of perfectly grouped stars they stretched about us, those sun-circles, filling the heavens about us; but now, far ahead, there shone out ever more brilliant at the center of this great universe another great circle of suns, that seemed the largest in all this universe. A score of titanic, flaming stars, they hung there at this galaxy's center, and it was toward these that our racing ships were heading.

Toward them we gazed with intense interest as our ships fled on, but suddenly were startled back to realization of our immediate surroundings by a great rumbling and grating from beneath, our ship swaying to one side and heeling sickeningly over, even as it flashed ahead. In sudden tense silence we stood, listening to that rumbling and cracking beneath, and then up from the speech-tube beside me there came a startled cry from one of our crew below.

"The ship's splitting!" he cried. "The walls have been grating and giving ever since we ran through that radio-active disintegrating-region —and now the ship's beginning to break in two!"

There was an instant of silence in the pilot room, the only sound that fearful grating rumble from beneath as gradually the ship's walls, weakened and crumbled by the disintegrating vibrations of the radio-active region through which we had plunged, began at last to split. A moment more, we knew, would see our ship riven apart there in space, with instant annihilation the fate of all of us. Silent, stunned, for a moment we stood there, the Andromedans beside us comprehending the situation as well as ourselves; then I whirled around to Korus Kan, flung my arm up toward the great central sun-circle that lay now full ahead, nearest of all the sun-groups to our onward-racing ships.

"Full speed!" I cried to him. "There's a chance still that we can get to those suns and worlds before the ship breaks up!"

With that cry the Antarian flung open the power-control, and instantly our ship, rumbling and groaning still as its walls gave about us, plunged on at utmost speed. I knew that we had perhaps a chance in a thousand to reach the worlds inside that sun-circle before our craft broke beneath our feet, but it was our only chance, and as we reeled on now with the generators roaring their greatest power, and with a thunderous, cracking roar rising from beneath also as our walls parted, it was with the consciousness that the next few moments would seal our fate. The great fleet of Andromedan ships about us had leapt forward with us, were behind and about us, but for the moment all our attention was centered upon the great circle of suns ahead, largening before us swiftly as with one last great burst of speed our ship shot through the void toward it.

Our ship swayed blindly over, now, even as it reeled on through space, another great crash of riven metal coming to our ears from beneath, the floor slanting steeply up beneath us. Flung against the wall as we were, though, Korus Kan clung still to the controls, heading our swaying flying-ship straight on toward the sun-circle, until in a moment more we had reached that circle, were slanting downward at the same terrific speed above that great ring of mighty suns. Inside that vast circle there moved a mighty swarm of thronging worlds, as in the other sun-circles, but at the very center of this vast swarm of planets there hung motionless a single gigantic planet, largest by far of all in this universe, a huge central world down toward which our own crazily swaying ship and the ships about us were slanting!

Down—down—there was a sudden rush of air about our ship as we shot toward the surface of the great planet, and I had a flashing glimpse of that surface, scores of miles beneath, through our window—a smooth, park-like surface swarming with hordes of the gaseous Andromedans and with ascending and descending ships, a surface in which I seemed to glimpse innumerable round, well-like openings, but upon which I could see no buildings. Abruptly, though, even as I glanced downward, there came a tremendous final cracking from our ship's center, each end tipped sharply down from that center as the crumbling craft broke cleanly in half, and then the two wrecked halves of it were whirling down toward the surface of the great world far below!

12. The Council Decides

OF THE moment following, while we rushed thus down to death, flung into a corner of the pilot room by the ship's splitting, I remember most clearly the rush of cold air that shrieked through our falling half. Had our ship broken in empty space instead of in the air of that great world's atmosphere, we would have met instant annihilation; since even the gaseous Andromedans, as I was

later to find, could not live save in air, like ourselves, their gaseous bodies disintegrating in any other element. For the moment, though, as we flashed down toward the surface of the world beneath, it seemed that death for us had been delayed but a moment. We were whirled crazily around as our wrecked half of the ship fell, and through the window I had a glimpse of the ground beneath, rushing up to meet us with appalling speed. I tensed for the crash, and for death, as it leapt up toward us—nearer—nearer——

There was a hoarse cry from Jhul Din, and I glimpsed in the next instant a dark, great shape that swooped down past and beneath us from above. The next instant, just as I waited for the annihilating impact with the ground, there was a slight jar, a clang of metal against metal from beneath, and then swiftly, miraculously, our wild fall was slackening. In another moment the ground was just beneath us, and smoothly and slowly we sank downward, coming to rest upon it without a jar! I staggered up to the window, gazing forth, stunned by that sudden escape from inescapable annihilation, and then saw the explanation of it. Our half of the wrecked ship was resting upon the back of one of the great, flat Andromedan ships, that had flashed down under it and caught it upon itself, bearing us down to the ground and saving us from the crash and from death!

A moment more and we were stumbling out of the pilot room, down to the ground from the Andromedan ship on which we rested. As we reached it I saw that the other falling half of our ship had been saved in the same way by another Andromedan craft, lying close beside us on that craft with the members of our crew in it pouring out to join us. Another instant and they stood with us, a vast mass of the gliding, gaseous Andromedans that swarmed on this world's surface having collected about us, a strange, silent horde that I knew were contemplating us with their alien sense of sight. Quickly toward us, though, came the half-dozen Andromedans who had been with us in the ship and had escaped with us, leading us now through the throngs of gaseous figures about us toward some destination of their own.

As we moved along with them, though, our interest was not so much in our destination as in the stupendous and unparalleled scene about us. Far away to the distant horizons stretched the smooth surface of this great world, covered with an even growth of jet-black sod that gave it an extraordinarily park-like appearance, with here and there tall, spiked growths or plants of the same ebon black. That blackness, as I guessed, was due to the perpetual, fierce light of the great ring of suns that belted the firmament overhead, the circle of suns at whose center this mighty planet hung, and whose ceaseless light would naturally give to this world's vegetation a pigmentation of deepest black. The belt of giant suns above, the countless swarms of Andromedans about us, like gliding pillars of misty green gas, the ebon vegetation, the masses of mighty ships that rose and descended ceaselessly in the broad areas set aside for them—all these held us silent with the silence of awe, as with our guides we moved on.

It was none of these things, though, wonderful as they were, that intrigued me most of all about us—it was the total absence of buildings, of visible structures or habitations, on all the surface of this world. The smooth black sod, the countless Andromedan throngs, the departing and arriving ships—these were all that were visible about us, all except a great number of round, well-like shafts that opened in the ground everywhere about us. These shafts were some six feet across, and were placed always in pairs, or groups of two, and as I gave them

more attention I saw, in a moment, that they held the answer to the absence of all buildings about us. For into them and out of them the gaseous Andromedans were moving in ceaseless streams, moving straight into one empty shaft and sinking smoothly downward out of sight, upheld by some force at the shaft's bottom beneath that nullified gravity just enough to make it possible for them to float gently down. From the other shaft of the pair, too, other Andromedans would be rising smoothly upward through the air, reaching the surface and gliding away, that other ascending shaft having at its bottom a constant force sufficient not only to nullify completely the pull of gravity but to give all in the shaft a slight upward thrust.

Into these shafts, as we moved past them, I glanced down, and saw that far beneath they opened into brilliant-lit rooms and halls, some of great size. I understood, then, how they had come to be used, how the Andromedans, their vast hordes cramped upon the surface of their worlds, had removed all buildings from the surface and had sunk them deep in the ground itself, subterranean buildings that could be entered or left by the ascending and descending shafts, and that gave them all the surface of their worlds free for their ships and to move about on. In and out of the great buildings sunken in the ground beneath us were moving constant streams of Andromedans, up and down the shafts; and now we saw that before us lay a pair of such shafts much greater in size than all others we had seen, and the center of a great rush of traffic of the gaseous beings about us. It was toward these greater shafts that our Andromedan companions were leading us, the figures before us giving way as we approached.

A moment more and we stood at the edge of the descending shaft, the Andromedans beside us motioning toward it and moving over its edge, sinking smoothly downward. Hesitatingly I followed, stepped from the edge into the empty air of the shaft; but the next moment my fear left me, for instead of plunging down a dead weight, I and my companions who had followed me were sinking downward as gently as though gripped and upheld by unseen hands. Down we floated, through the great shaft bright-lit by the belted suns above, down until we were sinking down out of the shaft itself into a vast, white-lit hall that stretched away for a great distance in all directions from us, and down from the center of whose ceiling, where the two great shafts opened from above, we were sinking.

SMOOTHLY we sank downward from the great hall's ceiling to its floor, landing upon a great disk inset in that floor beneath the descending shaft and glowing with dark purple light, the glowing force that combatted gravitation enough in the shaft above it to allow us to float gently down. For the moment, though, I paid not so much attention to it as to the strange, vast hall in which we now stood. Colossal in size and circular of shape, the mighty, white-lit room was as large or larger even than the great Council Hall of the Federated Suns, in our own universe, though it was far different in appearance. There were in it no ranks of seats, the smooth floor being divided by crossing black lines into thousands of squares of equal size, and in each of those squares there rested, motionless, one of the gaseous Andromedans, thousands upon thousands of them, like massed columns of thick green vapor, being grouped in the great room about us.

We stood ourselves on a section of the floor at the room's very center, raised a few feet above the rest of the floor, and except for the two purple-glowing disks beneath the ascension and descension shafts the only object upon this raised portion was a great

globe of what seemed misty glass, exactly like the tiny one with which the Andromedans had first communicated with us, but of vastly greater size, being some dozen feet in diameter. Toward this, as we hesitated there at the center of that gigantic assemblage of strange, silent figures, there moved the leader of the Andromedans who had accompanied us. He grasped with his two gaseous arms the metal studs that projected out from the great globe's base, and at once the misty sphere glowed with inward light, while in it appeared the thousand Andromedan ships, flashing out into the void, rescuing us from the serpent-fleet, and bringing us back into their own universe, a swift succession of explanatory scenes.

This explanation completed, the Andromedan moved back from the great sphere and motioned me toward it. Slowly I stepped forward, sensing the gaze of the massed, silent thousands on me. I knew that it was the supreme moment of our mission, the moment for which we had battled our way through three universes, the chance to obtain from this great council of the Andromedans the help that might save our universe. I glanced back to the anxious faces of my friends, drew a long breath, and then grasped the two studs before me, concentrating all my thoughts on what I wished to express, as the big sphere above glowed with inward light again, the thrilling current from it rushing into my brain.

In the glowing globe now appeared our universe, a great galaxy of stars floating in space like their own. Swiftly, with shifting thoughts, I showed them its throngs of peopled worlds, the traffic that swept between its suns, the ordered life of its teeming, dissimilar races. Then as my thoughts shifted again they saw the first five thousand serpent-ships rushing in upon that galaxy, destroying all our fleet and settling upon the suns and worlds of the Cancer cluster, saw us fleeing inward and then turning to capture one of the serpent-ships by boarding it in mid-space. Then, briefly, the globe flashed forth the interior of our own great Council Hall, with our Council Chief exhibiting and explaining the records of the serpent-people which we had captured in their ship. In a swift flash I explained the meaning of those records, a flash that showed the serpent-people, masters of the suns and worlds of our own universe, sailing out with increased powers to attack the Andromeda universe, and as that flashing scene showed in the great globe I saw a silent stir of excitement run through the massed thousands about me.

In another moment, though, the globe's scene had shifted back to the Council Hall, with ourselves receiving our orders from the Council Chief, entering our captured serpent-ship and slanting up and outward, bursting past the patrolling serpent-ships, through the void of outer space, only to be captured by the other serpent-ships that had come out to meet us. Our flight then to the serpent-universe, our glimpse of the vast serpent-fleet being built, and the colossal death-beam cone, and the escape of Jhul Din appeared in swift succession. Then came our own strange captivity, our rescue by Jhul Din and escape outward from the serpent-universe through the great space-forts, and our pursuit and final rescue by the thousand Andromedan ships. Then, as our final plea, I showed the vast hordes of serpent-ships and their irresistible mighty death-beam cone sailing out from the dying universe toward our own, rushing upon our galaxy and wiping out all its races. The great globe then went dark, as I released my hold upon its studs and stepped back from it. Our mission was ended, and its success or failure lay in the hands of the massed Andromedans about us.

There was a moment of stillness, a moment in which, I knew, the fate of

our universe and of all in it was being decided, a moment in which the silence of the mighty hall seemed thunderous to our strained nerves. Then I saw each of the thousands of Andromedans in the hall reach down toward two smaller metal studs that projected from the floor before each, and as the great globe beside me glowed again with light, I sensed quickly that upon it would be registered the decision of the majority of the great council about me, the method used by them in reaching and registering a decision. Tensely we watched the great glowing globe, and then in it appeared another scene.

It was a scene of countless ships, gleaming flat Andromedan ships, gathering from all the suns and worlds of their universe, upon the giant central world where we were now, tens of thousands of great ships that rose from that world, slanting up and outward. Among them were a hundred ships quite different from the rest, great hemispheres of gleaming metal that rose as smoothly and swiftly as the rest, domed side uppermost; and as though in explanation there flashed in the globe a swift picture of those same hundred domed craft hanging above great suns in the Andromeda universe, projecting down beside and around them great walls and sheaths of the dark-purple glowing force that neutralized gravity, so that those suns, screened from the pull of the suns on their right by a great wall of that glowing purple force, would move away to the left in answer to the pull of the suns there, or vice versa. These, I realized swiftly, were the great sun-swinging ships by means of which the Andromedans had placed their suns in ordered circles, and now in the globe with all the tens of thousands of ordinary flat Andromedan ships they were flashing out into space. Then came a brief scene of the whole vast Andromedan fleet flashing down out of space upon the dying universe, bursting through the opening in the great blue-force wall around it and attacking all the serpent-creatures' suns and worlds!

The next instant the globe had gone dark again, but I knew now what the decision of the council was, and I whirled around to my friends with excitement flaming up in me. "They're going to help us!" I cried. "They're going to mass all their great fleet and with it and their sun-swinging ships sail to attack the serpent-universe!"

I can not remember now the moments that followed that momentous decision, so overwhelming to us then was the consciousness that we had succeeded in our mission, had dared the awful void and the perils of three universes and had procured the help that might save our galaxy. I remember being led by our Andromedan guides into and through other rooms off the great hall; of the thousands of gaseous figures of the council crowding up the shaft toward the surface above, to speed to every quarter of their universe and summon all their fighting-ships; of Jhul Din noisy with exultation and Korus Kan quiet as ever, but with gleaming eyes. Then all about me seemed dissolving and darkening as the utter fatigue of our strenuous last hours overcame me, a fatigue through which only my knowledge of our mission's importance had so far borne me, and beneath which now I sank into dreamless sleep.

WHEN I awoke I sensed that hours had passed, though Jhul Din and our followers lay still unconscious about me. Leaving them there, I strode out of the room and into the great Council Hall, whose stupendous circle lay empty now and bare, seeming immeasurably more vast in its white-lit emptiness than when filled with the thousands of gaseous Andromedans. I moved across it to the raised section at the center, stepped upon the purple-glowing disk beneath the ascending shaft, and then, thrust upward by the force of that disk, was

moving smoothly toward the round opening in that ceiling and on up the shaft until I had burst out into the unceasing light of the belt of suns above, stepping sidewise onto the ground as I did so. And now I saw that Korus Kan, not a dozen feet away, had turned and was coming toward me.

"Their ships are gathering, Dur Nal!" he exclaimed, eyes alight. "You've slept for nearly a day, there below, and their ships have been coming in those hours from every sun and world in their universe!"

I swept my gaze about, a certain awe filling me as I saw now the tremendous forces that had gathered and were gathering here on the surface of this giant central world. A tremendous circular area of miles in diameter around us, around the shafts that led down to the hall of the council, had been cleared of all else and was now a single vast gathering-point for the thousands of ships that were massing here. Even while we gazed, the air above was being darkened by the swarms of those ships that shot ceaselessly downward, landing in this great circular area, drawing up in regular rows and masses. In tens of thousands they were grouped about us, a tremendous plain of gleaming metal ships that stretched as far as the eye could reach.

At the center of this vast plain of ships, though, there lay a round clearing, in which we ourselves stood, a clearing in which there rested only a hundred other ships, different far from the thousands around them, a hundred domed, gleaming craft like giant hemispheres of metal. Not a thousand feet from us lay these great, strange craft, their space-doors open and their Andromedan crews busy among the masses of strange mechanisms inside, and I recognized them instantly as the great craft I had seen in the thought-pictures in the Council Hall below, the mighty ships whose projected sheaths and walls of dark-purple force could move giant suns at will.

"The sun-swinging ships!" I exclaimed, and Korus Kan nodded, his eyes upon them also.

"Yes," he said, "they'll be the most powerful weapons of the whole great fleet — with them we can crash the suns and worlds of the serpent-universe together at will."

Now, though, we turned our attention from them to the tens of thousands of ships that lay about us. In and out of those ships, too, were moving countless masses of Andromedans, swift-gliding gaseous figures who were inspecting and testing the mechanisms of their craft and the cylinders in their sides that shot forth the crumpling shafts of force. They were making all ready for our start, we knew, for the battle that must ensue when we poured down on the serpent-universe, and we strode over toward them. Already we had learned that the controls and mechanisms of the Andromedan ships were much like those of the serpent-ships, their speed being fully as great, but some features of them were still strange to me. A dozen steps only we took toward them, though, and then stopped short.

For down out of the sunlight above was slanting toward us a close-massed swarm of ships that seemed different from the masses of ships that were landing ceaselessly about us, that moved more slowly, more deliberately. Down it came while we watched it, standing there, seeing it change from a far swarm of black dots in the sunlight above to a mass of long dark shapes, that were becoming clearer to our eyes each moment—shapes that, I saw with a sudden great leap of my heart, were not long and flat, but oval!

"They're serpent-ships!" Korus Kan's great cry stabbed like a sword-blade of sound toward me. "They're the serpent-ships that pursued us to this universe—the three hundred that escaped when we were rescued —

they've seen this great fleet gathering and have come to strike a blow at it!"

Serpent-ships! My mind was racing with superhuman speed in that instant as they drove down toward us, and I saw that the Antarian was right, that these were the three hundred that had escaped when we were rescued by the Andromedans, and that we thought had fled back to their own universe. Instead they had turned and followed us, knowing that we meant to gather forces to attack their universe, had flashed into the Andromeda universe toward this central world, unseen among the swarms of other ships that were gathering here, and now were swooping down with their score of great disk attraction-ships lowermost, driving down toward us in a fierce, reckless attack! In a single instant it all flashed plain in my mind, and then Korus Kan and I had whirled around, and he was racing back toward the hundred domed sun-swinging ships behind us.

"I'll warn these hundred ships!" he yelled, as I turned too and raced toward the nearest of the thousands of fighting-ships about us.

Even as I ran toward those thousands of ships, though, their Andromedan crews still unaware of their peril, I saw the massed serpent-ships above slanting straight down toward the hundred domed craft behind me, their attraction-ships hanging motionless above those craft for a moment. I had reached the Andromedan fighting-ships, now, and as the crews of the nearest glided forth to meet me I cried out, pointing upward. They saw the serpent-ships swooping down from above, and then were throwing themselves into their own ships. I raced into one with them, up to the pilot room set near the stem on its long flat upper surface. The Andromedans beside me flung back the controls, then, and our ship and the ships about us were leaping up like light toward the down-rushing serpent-ships.

At the same moment I saw Korus Kan racing into one of the domed sun-swinging ships above which hovered the score of attraction-ships, saw the doors of those domed ships clanging shut as they prepared to escape from the menace above, since they could project their mighty purple force downward only, and would thus be helpless if caught in the attraction-grip of the disk-ships above. A moment more and those hundred domed craft, the most powerful weapon of the great Andromedan fleet, would be safe, I knew. But in that moment, as the three hundred serpent fighting-ships dashed down toward us, I saw the score of hovering attraction-ships glow suddenly with flickering light; the hundred sun-swinging ships beneath were pulled smoothly upward by that tremendous attractive force; and then the attraction-ships, grasping the hundred domed craft that were the heart of our fleet, were racing straight up and outward into space!

13. The Sailing of the Fleet

AS THAT score of glowing disk-ships, with our own hundred sun-swinging craft in their grip, flashed up and out of sight, our fighting-ships were flashing upward with the three hundred fighting-ships of the serpent-creatures racing down to meet us. Then, before we could swerve aside from their mad downward charge to pursue the attraction-ships, they had met us, and in all the world about us there was nothing for the moment but crashing and striking ships. Even as they had flashed down upon us, and we up to meet them, the invisible shafts of force from our cylinders had stabbed up and crossed their downward-reaching death-beams, so that scores of their own ships had crumpled and collapsed in the instant before we met them, scores of ours in turn driving crazily forward and sidewise as the pale beams wiped all life from them in that same moment.

As we met them, though, it seemed that our ships and theirs were all to perish alike in crashes in midair, without further need of weapons, so terrific was the impact.

All about us in that moment I glimpsed ships smashing squarely into down-rushing serpent-ships, while our own craft spun and whirled as racing ships grazed along its sides. Then, hanging in the air there a scant mile above the ground, we whirled and grappled with the serpent-craft in a fierce, wild struggle. Their whole aim, we knew, was to keep us occupied long enough to permit the escape of their attraction-ships with our own sun-swinging craft in their grasp, while our object, in turn, was to brush aside these serpent-ships before us and race in pursuit of the attraction-ships. Charge and struggle as we might, though, in the moments following we could not break loose from the fury of the serpent-creatures' attack, who drove toward us with death-beams whirling in all the mad recklessness of despair.

I saw Andromedan ships all about us driving aimlessly away as those pale beams struck them, saw others destroyed by serpent-ships that crashed deliberately into them, and then pouring up from beneath came the masses of the great fleet beneath, thousands of ships that raced up and around the struggling serpent-ships, crumpling and destroying them with countless invisible shafts of force from their cylinders. Within another moment the last of the enemy craft had vanished, but by that time our own ship and a half-thousand others were flashing up in pursuit of the attraction-ships.

Up, up we raced—up until the giant world was but a tiny ball beneath, hanging at the center of the great ring of suns — but then we stopped, and hung motionless. For we were, we saw, too late. About us there stretched only the far-reaching circles of flaming suns that made up the Andromeda universe, with no sign of the attraction-ships or their prey. In those moments that the struggling serpent-craft had held us back, the attraction-ships had flashed out from this universe into the boundless gulf of space, with the hundred sun-swinging craft in their grasp, with Korus Kan himself in one of those ships. On none of our space-charts were they visible, safe from our pursuit out in the void, and we knew that somewhere in that void our sun-swinging craft and all in them were meeting their end, held in the relentless grasp of the attraction-ships and destroyed by them, since the sun-swinging craft could project their own terrific forces only downward. We were too late. Silently, slowly, we slanted back down toward the great central world.

As we came to rest there, among the tens of thousands of other gathered ships, I saw Jhul Din and our followers, aroused from beneath by the battle, running forward to meet me. I saw him glance about as he came toward me, inquiry in his glance, and then I shook my head.

"We've lost the most powerful weapon of the whole Andromedan fleet," I told him, slowly. "And we've lost, too, Korus Kan."

I think that in the hours that followed, while the last thousands of ships swept in from all quarters of the Andromeda universe to gather around us, it was the loss of our friend that lay heavier on the minds of both myself and the Spican than that of the hundred sun-swinging ships. Those hundred ships, we knew, would have enabled us to wreck all the serpent-universe, whereas now we must meet them ship to ship, and trust to courage and fighting-power alone to win for us. Yet even their loss seemed small to us beside that of the friend with whom we two had roved all the ways of our galaxy in the cruisers of the Interstellar Patrol, with whom we had dared across the void and through

the serpent-universe and its perils, toward this Andromeda universe. Silent, though, we remained, watching the thousands of long, flat ships massing about us, and it was still in silence that I received from the Andromedan leaders the knowledge that I had been chosen to command their vast fleet in its great attack, since I was familiar with the serpent-universe which we were to attack.

A HALF-DOZEN hours after the raid of the serpent-ships, the last of the Andromedan craft had sped in from the farthest suns of their universe, and a full hundred thousand mighty ships covered the surface of the great world as far as the eye could reach, gleaming there beneath the light of the belted suns above. Long, grim and ready they waited, their gaseous Andromedan crews alert at the controls, while before us lay in the central clearing our own long, flat flagship. In it, too, the Andromedan crew stood ready, the scant score of my own strange followers among them, its space-door open and waiting for our start. Standing beside it, though, Jhul Din and I paused; then I turned back to where the score or more of Andromedans that were their leaders, the chiefs of their great council, stood.

Tall, steady figures of strange, thick green gas they stood there, regarding me, I knew. They had gathered all their forces to save a universe alien to themselves, to crush the serpent-peoples, and had placed all those forces under the command of myself, an alien to them. The greatness of their spirit, the calm, vast magnanimity of them, struck home to me in that moment, and impulsively I reached a hand out toward them once more, felt it grasped and gripped as though by solid flesh by a score of gaseous arms; a moment in which, across all the differences of mind and shape, the beings of two universes gripped hands in kinship of spirit. Then I had turned from them, and with Jhul Din was moving into our great ship, up to the pilot room, where the Spican took his position at the controls. The space-door below slammed shut, our generators throbbed suddenly, and then we were slanting smoothly upward.

Before me stood a tall, square instrument bearing a bank of black keys—keys that transmitted to the ships of our vast fleet my formation and speed orders, as I pressed them. I pressed one now, as we shot upward, glimpsed a long rank of ships on the ground behind and beneath us rising smoothly after us in answer, pressed another and saw another rank rising and following, until within a few moments more the whole of the vast fleet, a hundred thousand gleaming ships, had risen and was driving up and outward, with our flag-ship in the van. Up we moved, until we were slanting up over the ring of mighty suns that encircled the great central worlds and the swarms of smaller planets, that central world vanishing behind us as we flashed on, and the great circle of suns about it, and the suns beside us, all dropping smoothly behind.

Out between those great circles of suns we moved, our great fleet in a long, streaming line to avoid all danger of collisions with the suns and worlds about us. I saw the Andromedans in the pilot room with me standing motionless by its windows as we flashed on past the circled suns and swarming worlds of their universe, knew that they were watching those suns and worlds drop behind as they moved out to the great struggle that would decide the fate of their universe as well as of my own. Then at last we were racing out between the last great circles of suns, out over the edge of the Andromeda universe into the blackness and emptiness of outer space once more.

Now as the great darkness of the void lay before us, I pressed the keys before me in swift succession, and at once the thousands of ships behind me

leapt into a new formation, that of a colossal hollow pyramid that flashed through space with my flag-ship at its apex. Faster and faster our great fleet shot out into the void, the tremendous mass of ships behind me uniformly increasing their speed, until at last at our utmost velocity we were racing on toward the faint, wraith-like glow of the serpent-universe ahead.

Outward, into the darkness and silence of the eternal void, we were flashing once more, but as I stood with Jhul Din there in the pilot room, watching the great Andromeda universe dwindling in the darkness behind us, no exultation filled me. We had done what none in our galaxy ever before had done, had crossed the gulf and procured the aid with which we were racing to crush our enemies before they could pour down upon us, but my thoughts were not on these things but on the friends we were leaving behind us. Somewhere out in the void from that Andromeda universe, Korus Kan had gone to his death with the sun-swinging ships, and as we sped on through the void toward the serpent-universe it was the thought of that that held our minds rather than that of the great battle before us.

Hour upon hour of swift flight was dropping behind us as we raced steadily and smoothly on, detouring far around the great heat-regions and radio-active regions that we encountered, heading on toward the serpent-universe that was glowing ever broader before us. Smooth, immeasurable and endless they seemed, those hours of swift and steady flight, but at last we became aware that they were coming to an end, the dying universe ahead a great dim glow across all the blackness of the firmament. Ever our eyes hung upon that misty region of light as we flashed nearer and nearer to it, and ever the same doubt, the same wonder, rose and grew in our minds. Could we, really, crush and destroy the serpent-peoples in this strange universe? What would be the outcome of the tremendous battle we must fight in it to prevent the serpent-hordes from pouring across space toward our own universe?

Before us now the somber splendor of the dying universe filled the heavens, a vast mass of dead and dying suns, black and burned-out stars and suns of smoky crimson, glowing in the blackness of space like the embers of a mighty, dying fire. Around that great, dim-glowing mass we could make out the gigantic shell of flickering blue light, all but invisible, that surrounded it, the titanic and impenetrable wall of vibrations that enclosed it. In toward that wall our vast fleet was racing, moving at slackening speed as I touched a key before me, until at last the mighty flickering barrier loomed close ahead, the single opening in it, guarded by the huge space-forts on each side, lying straight before us. And as we drew within sight of that opening we saw, hanging in space just inside it, massed solidly across it, a thousand oval ships!

"The serpent-ships!" I exclaimed. "They're going to hold the gate of their universe against us!"

Jhul Din was staring at them as though puzzled. "But why only a thousand ships?" he said. "Why haven't they massed all their great fleet there at the gate——"

But I had turned, had pressed the keys before me in swift succession, and at once our tremendous fleet had slowed and smoothly halted, hanging there in space. Then, as I depressed still other keys, our vast mass of ships split smoothly into three separate masses, my flag-ship at the van of the central mass, the others moving to right and to left of us. A moment our three great masses of ships hung there, and then those on either side of us had flashed toward the great space-forts that guarded each side of

the great opening, while our own central mass, my ship at its head, drove straight in toward the great opening itself!

Straight toward and into the opening raced our close-massed ships and then the next moment it seemed that all the universe about was transformed into a single awful mass of pale beams that stabbed toward and through us from the space-forts on each side and from the close-massed ships ahead. How our own ship escaped annihilation in that first moment of terrific, reeling shock, I can not guess; since behind and about us scores of our ships were driving crazily away, their occupants annihilated by the deadly beams. Yet from all our own craft, reeling blindly as they were there in the opening, our cylinders were loosing their shafts of invisible force upon the space-forts to each side and upon the serpent-ships that leapt toward us from ahead.

Then as those ships met ours, there in the narrow opening with the huge towering space-forts at each side, there ensued a moment of battle so terrific—battle more awful in its concentrated fury than any I had ever yet experienced—that it seemed impossible that ships and living beings could fight thus and live. Terrific was the scene about us—the vast black vault of infinite outer space behind us, the far-flung, dim-glowing mass of the dying universe before us, the gigantic wall of pale blue flickering light that separated the two, the single opening in that wall, flanked by the titanic metal space-forts, in which our thousands of close-massed ships charged forward toward the onrushing serpent-ships.

SHIPS were crashing and smashing as we met them, death-beams were whirling thick from their ships and from the huge space-forts, serpent-craft were crumpling and collapsing beneath our shafts of force—and still our own ships were reeling away in scores as the death-beams found them. I knew that not for long could we continue this suicidal combat, since though the serpent-ships before us were being swiftly wiped out, the space-forts on each side still played their beams upon us with deadly effect. The other two divisions of our great fleet, dashing to attack the space-forts from outside while we battled there in the opening between them, had been thrust back, I saw, from each attack by the masses of pale beams that sprang from the forts.

But as the whole struggle hung thus in doubt, as our ships fell in fierce battle there in the opening beneath the beams of the forts, I saw a score of ships among those attacking the right-hand fort drive suddenly toward that fort with all their terrific utmost speed, leaping toward it like great thunderbolts of metal. From the great castle the death-beams sprang toward that score of ships, sweeping through them and wiping all life instantly from them, but before the ships had time to swerve or reel aside from that mad onward flight their terrific speed had carried them onward, and with a mighty, shattering collision they had crashed straight into the great fort's side.

I saw the great metal walls of the space-fort buckling and collapsing beneath that awful impact, and then all the space-fort had collapsed also, like a thing of paper, crushing within itself the serpent-creatures and generators and death-beam tubes it had held. To our left, another score of ships were leaping toward the left-hand fort in the same manner, and as they crashed into it, racing on through a storm of death-beams that swept through them, the left-hand space-fort too had buckled and crumpled and collapsed. At the same moment the last of the thousand serpent-ships before us was falling beneath our force-shafts, and then the

great opening lay clear before us, with neither serpent-ships nor space-forts now in sight. We had forced the gates of the serpent-universe!

Then, our vast fleet massing together once more, we swept in through the opening, in a long column, into the dying universe. A full two thousand of our hundred thousand ships we had lost in that mad attack on the great gates, but heeded that but little as we flashed now into the serpent-creatures' universe. Through the dead and dying suns we sped, holding to a close-massed formation and moving slowly and cautiously forward. At every moment I expected the great serpent-fleet to burst out upon us from behind some dead or dying sun, for I knew that their allowing us to advance through their universe thus unhindered meant only that they had prepared some ambush for us. Yet as we sped in toward the center of the dying universe, there appeared no single enemy craft about us or on our space-charts, a total absence of all serpent-ships that began to affect our nerves as we drove ever more tensely forward.

At last there appeared far ahead the majestic trio of giant, crimson suns that swung at this universe's heart, and as we moved down toward these we knew that at last the final struggle was at hand, since between those suns turned the great world that was the heart of the serpent-civilization. Down toward that world we slanted smoothly, expecting every moment the uprush from it of the great serpent-fleet; yet still were we unchallenged and unattacked as we moved downward. Upon us there leapt no serpent-ships; in space about us, as we sank lower and lower, were no craft other than our own. In breathless silence we watched, sinking down toward the great sphere's surface, until at last we hung at a bare thousand feet above that surface, the mighty city of blue force stretching from horizon to horizon beneath us. And at sight of that city there burst from us wild, stunned cries.

For the mighty city was—empty! Empty, lifeless, its streets deserted and bare, its vast mass of towering structures of blue vibrations without occupant of any kind! No single serpent-shape moved in all that tremendous city, and I saw that upon the great clearing where the vast serpent-fleet and the colossal death-beam cone had rested there was now nothing. The world beneath us, the universe about us, were a world, universe—deserted!

"Too late!" Jhul Din's cry came to my ears like the voice of doom. "The defense of the gate was only to delay us, and the serpent-races have gone—they've struck! They've massed all their hordes in their great fleet and with their giant death-beam cone have sailed out across the void to attack our universe! We're too late!"

Too late! The thought beat upon my brain like drum-beats of horror as we stood there, in utter silence. All had been in vain—our tremendous journey, our fierce struggles, the loss of Korus Kan—since already far across the void the serpent-hordes in their countless ships were rushing toward our universe, where their vanguard had prepared a foothold for them. They had known that we were summoning help from the Andromeda universe, had swiftly gathered and sailed on their great attack, leaving only a force at the great gate to delay us. Too late! Then suddenly resolution flamed again inside me, and I pressed swiftly the keys before me, sent our whole fleet turning and speeding outward again—out through the dying universe away from the great trio of suns at its center—out toward the great opening in the vibration-wall.

"Too late—*no!*" I shouted. "We'll follow them across the void toward our own universe! They could not have completed that great death-beam cone

yet—they've taken it with them to our own universe to complete it there—and if we can reach them and attack them before they have time to complete it, we yet may save our universe!"

Now our great fleet was rushing toward and through the opening in the vibration-wall, out into the void of outer space once more. There we halted, massed again in our pyramidal flight-formation, and then were turning slowly toward the left, toward the far little patch of glowing light that was our universe. Then we were moving toward it, with swiftly gathering speed, faster and faster, until at our utmost velocity we were racing through the infinite immensities of space toward it; flashing on toward the last act of the vast, cosmic drama that was rising now to its climax; rushing on through the void toward the final great battle in which the destinies of three mighty universes and all their suns and worlds and peoples were to be decided for all time!

Three universes fight to the death in the colossal chapters that bring this story to an end in next month's WEIRD TALES

BUT WAS IT?

By OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

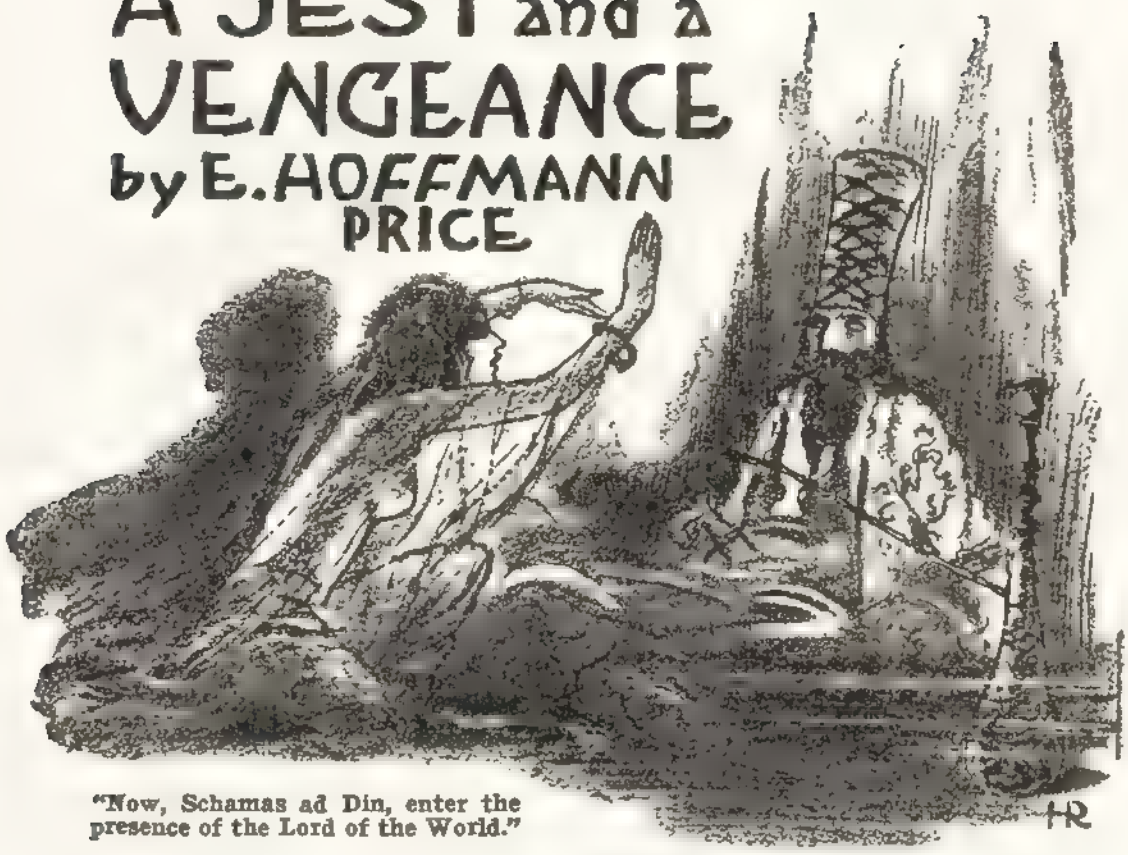
I woke in terror; on my window-pane
A thing had tapped—was tapping—now—again.
  Afraid to look, I drew the covers high;
  Then something moaned: "Admit me ere I die."
"A dream," I mused, "for nothing can be there;"
And thought it was from eating caviar.
  But was it?

Again I slept, again I woke in fear;
My reason told me: "Nothing can be here;"
  And yet, a horrid wailing sound I heard
  That could not be from insect, beast or bird.
I plugged my ears and swore that it must be
The awful consequence of eating brie.
  But was it?

Once more to sleep, and once more wide awake.
A shrill, unearthly shriek that made me quake
  Came from without: "Have you no mercy, friend?
  Open the window, or it is the end."
I looked, and saw a beauteous, white-faced thing,
Shrouded in mist—a vampire on the wing.
  But was it?

A JEST and a VENGEANCE

by E. HOFFMANN PRICE



"Now, Schamas ad Din, enter the presence of the Lord of the World."

A BULLET flattened itself against the chiseled arabesques of the wall behind Sultan Schamas ad Din of Angor-lana, spattering him with bits of lead and splinters of marble.

"Maksoud is a notoriously wretched marksman," observed the sultan as he fingered the leaden slug which Amru, his white-haired wazir, had retrieved from the tiled floor. "Still, with enough trials——"

The sultan thrust his cushions a sword's length to the right, and moved just far enough to be secure against further rifle fire from the minaret of the neighboring mosque.

"With enough trials," resumed Schamas ad Din, "Maksoud may not have to wait for the British Resident to find a pretext to depose me."

"It might not have been the son of your brother," suggested Amru, as he moved the fuming nargileh to the sultan's new position, and offered him the carved jade stem. "There are several who have old grudges to settle."

"Undoubtedly," agreed the sultan. "But who else would fire from the mosque? And then miss such an easy mark!"

From afar came the throbbing of drums that muttered of revolt in the mountains.

"Rebels without and assassins within! A luxurious little coffin, this city which the Old Tiger and I built with our swords. Then with this infidel Resident, and Maksoud, who can't wait for me to be deposed——"

The sultan coiled the tube of the nargileh about his wrist and drank

deeply of its white smoke. Then he achieved the smile he reserved for occasions demanding the higher justice.

"By Allah and by Abaddon and by the honor of my beard! Resident or no Resident, we will convince this Maksoud of his stupidity! Amru, call me that old bandit of an Ismeddin!"

"At once, *saidi*?" queried the old wazir, as he bowed.

"No. Tonight. He's doubtless asleep now, after a hard evening's discussion with some poorly guarded caravan."

THE drumming in the mountains at last ceased. But late that night, long after the outposts at Djeb el Azhár had been doubled, there came another and a different drumming, this time from the palace itself: very low, giving rather the sense of a massive vibration rather than of sound. And this deep pulsing was picked up and relayed until it crept into those very mountains where the tribesmen sharpened their curved yataghans, stuffed their scarlet saddle-bags with grain, and awaited the signal to descend and plunder, certain that they would not be pursued beyond the Sultan's borders, and safe in the assurance that the Resident was but waiting for a pretext to depose Schamas ad Din.

To one who lived in those mountains, and understood the code, the deep-voiced, far-relayed drum spoke very clearly; so that, late as it was, Ismeddin emerged from his cave, belted on a jeweled simitar that gleamed frostily against his tattered, greasy garments, and picked his way on foot along the hidden trails that led through the camps of the revolting tribesmen and to the plains below.

The darvish had heard the signal, and knew that the son of the Old Tiger was in need.

Ismeddin smiled as he heard the guttural chant of the rebels about their guard fires. But as he approached their outposts, he picked his way more warily, ceased smiling, muttered in his long beard something about the exceeding unfairness of having to contend with mounted sentries, and loosened the Ladder to Heaven in its scabbard. . . .

SINCE the flat roof of the palace at Angor-lana was higher than any building in the city, the sultan was passably secure against marksmen addicted to royal targets, particularly in view of his being in an angle of the parapet that could not be reached from the minaret of the mosque. And thus it was that he reclined at ease in the shadow of a striped canopy, sipping Shirazi wine to his heart's content and his soul's damnation.

But peace and sultans are strangers. A captain of the guard clanked into the Presence, saluted, and made his report: "*Saidi*, the troops at Djeb el Azhár surprized and captured a detachment of the rebels. A ragged old man riding a stolen horse led the outpost commander——"

"Ismeddin, by the Power and by the Splendor!" interrupted the sultan. "Where are the prisoners? And Ismeddin?"

"In the hall of audience, *saidi*. Abdurrahman Khan, his son, and sixty of their followers."

"Very good, Ismail," exulted the sultan. "We will pass sentence at once. Announce me to the court."

The older lords of the court, stout, white-haired ruffians, companions of the Old Tiger, knew well what the Old Tiger's son contemplated when he appeared in the hall of audience. And the younger lords knew the tradition, and beamed in anticipation of old glories revived.

Each of the two chief executioners had three assistants, standing a pace to the left and three paces to

the rear; and all were fingering the hilts of their two-handed swords.

There would be notable dismemberments, and a surprizing scarcity of rebels long before evening prayer. As for Abdurrahman Khan——

Old Ismeddin, ragged and grimy among the glittering captains, smiled as he thought of an ancient score.

And then the Resident appeared to take his customary station at the left of the throne. He whispered in the sultan's ear; but not even the fan-bearers behind the throne could hear what he said.

The captains exulted at the great rage that flamed in the sultan's eyes as he rose from the dais. But the captains gaped stupidly when the sultan spoke.

"Take these sons of flat-nosed mothers back to their cells. I will deal with them later."

The court dispersed.

The lords and ministers escorted the sultan to his apartments. The brazen doors closed softly behind him, so that they did not see him hurl his turban to the floor, did not hear his simitar clang against the tiles, rebound, and clatter into a corner. Nor did they hear the Resident, materialized at the height of the storm, expostulate: "But, your Majesty, you may have them hanged, you know—have all of them hanged, in public—roll of drums and all that. But one simply can't have these dismemberings and impalings, you know. Barbarous, and uncivilized, and all that."

Then the sultan, as he twice struck together his hands: "Amru, an order: release the rebels! And to each, his own horse and a robe of honor!"

The Resident endured the sultan's eye for a full moment, and admirably concealed his alarm. Then he left the Presence, conscious of duty well done, even if in the shadow of a bowstring with a running noose: enraged princes do forget themselves, and the sanctity of Residents.

But Schamas ad Din issued no further orders. He and his nargileh fumed and bubbled on the flat roof of the palace. . . .

Then the calm voice of Ismeddin: "A thousand years, *saidi*."

"And to you, a thousand," returned the sultan, as he rose to greet his old friend.

The darvish declined the honor of sharing the sultan's seat.

"Hard rocks are my cushions, *saidi*," he protested, as he squatted, cross-legged, at the sultan's feet. But he accepted the stem of the nargileh and solemnly inhaled its white fumes.

Amru set out fresh wine and withdrew; for that grimy wanderer from the mountains was closer to the sultan even than an old and trusted wazir.

"I summoned you last night to help me devise a quiet and effective way of dealing with my brother's son. Need I say that since Maksoud is a friend of the Resident, I need help?"

"Therefore," replied the darvish, "you put me to the trouble of stealing by night through the lines of the mountaineers." Then, smiling a crooked smile, he continued, "And I am an old man, *saidi*——"

"And I," retorted the sultan, "am by this day's work an old woman! That dog of an infidel! That friend of the rebels! The white-haired companions of the Old Tiger pity the mockery that his son has become."

"It is indeed vain in these evil days to be a king," observed Ismeddin. "Yet even a sultan should have his vengeance. And even Residents have their limitations."

Ismeddin smiled thinly, and fingered the hilt of the Ladder to Heaven.

"It is beyond any sword, Ismeddin," mourned the sultan. "In the old days one rode out of the mountains with a troop of horse. But now

a Resident stands behind my throne. Look what has happened to my old enemy the Rajah of Lacra-kai, on whom be peace!"

The darvish shrugged his shoulders. "I was in the hall of audience. I saw and I heard. And we two are powerless. But, *inschallah!* There is yet much that can be done."

"Then let it be done—before I am deposed."

"You shall have your vengeance, *saidi.* There is one who is the master of vengeances. The Lord of the World, who sits dreaming in the ruins of Atlânaat."

The sultan shivered. "Why speak of Atlânaat? There is some slight merit in living long enough to be deposed and end one's days in Feringhistan, spending an annuity and being addressed as Majesty. Many have entered Atlânaat in hopes of wisdom and loot, and have left without even hope of forgetting what they have seen. Really, Ismeddin, that monstrous citadel was built by devils, and Shaitan's little sister dances there by moonlight."

"Devils?" retorted Ismeddin. "Built rather by pre-Adamite kings."

"As you will," conceded the sultan. "The distinction is purely academic. Yet the fact remains that sane men find less and less reason for visiting that fiend-haunted ruin. Once, a very long time ago, I saw a very little. But that was entirely too much. And that music, and that strange sweetness that drifts up from the depths. . . ."

Again the sultan shivered.

"But I," countered Ismeddin, "have seen Atlânaat to its nethermost foundations. And there and there only lies your vengeance, and a jest such as the Old Tiger himself would have relished, if you can face the Lord of the World and his counsel." The darvish leaped to his feet. "*Saidi,* the Old Tiger would not have hesitated."

"Done, by Allah and by my beard!" swore the sultan. "Yet I know any number of places I would rather visit, either by day or by night. Nevertheless——"

"Let it then be nevertheless, my lord!"

The sultan twice clapped his hands.

Amru reappeared, and received orders: two horses at the Ispahan Gate, an hour after evening prayer; horses meanly equipped and poorly caparisoned.

But before Amru could leave, Ismeddin interposed: "A moment, oh father of all wazirs!"

And then, to the sultan: "What is to be done must be done quickly. Let Maksoud meet us at Atlânaat, so that the wisdom of the Lord of the World will not have time to cool in our ears."

The sultan nodded, then spoke very briefly of four tongueless, black mamelukes, and of Maksoud who was to accompany them; and this cavalcade was to leave the city by a small gate which had no name.

AN HOUR'S ride from the Ispahan Gate brought Ismeddin and the sultan to the edge of the jungle in whose depths brooded the foundations of prodigious Atlânaat. They halted for a moment to gaze at the uncounted domes and minarets that towered high above the jungle and muttered secret words to the stars as they crept out one by one. Then Ismeddin took the lead, the sultan following in his trace.

How strange, pondered the sultan, that he should ride alone in the jungle, following a white blur that was the dirty *djellab* of an old man who was so entirely at home in unsavory places; and how much stranger yet that he should step from his throne to seek aid from a darvish who lived in a cavern and pitied the futility of kings.

Then the sultan thought of his

vengeance, and wondered at the terrific words the Lord of the World would speak. . . .

The darvish finally halted at the edge of a clearing. Before them loomed the incredible bulk of the outer walls of Atlânaat, walls that had for ages mocked the age-old trees that sought to reach their parapet.

"To our left, *saidi*," announced the darvish.

They skirted the wall until they came to a breach wide enough to admit four horsemen abreast.

"Those who enter through the gate are seriously in error," commented Ismeddin, as he picked his way among the gigantic blocks of rose granite that still lay in the breach. "There is a sculptured hand on the keystone of the arch. . . ."

The moon had risen over the crests of the trees. Long shadows of columns shattered at mid-height marched across the broad, paved avenue that at the breach in the wall turned and led to the heart of the citadel.

"My lord," began Ismeddin, as the sultan cleared the last block of granite and drew up at his side, "we have not yet committed ourselves to anything."

"Conceivably," admitted the sultan, "the ride back to Angor-lana by moonlight would be pleasant. Yet Maksoud also would find it a pleasant ride. But tell me," continued Schamas ad Din, "what advantage there is in taking my vengeance here? It might be more odd and quaint than anything I might devise at home; but in the end, there would be the Resident——"

"Ah, but would there?" smiled Ismeddin. "The Lord of the World dreams strange things. However, if you wish——"

Ismeddin wheeled his horse about.

"Not at all!" countered the sultan. "To the finish, then. And as for this god and his playmate?"

"Even so, *saidi*."

The darvish led the way down the broad avenue. The sultan glanced once at the sculptured columns, shuddered, and found a glance sufficient. Then he smiled: for Maksoud would find Atlânaat not a bit more savory.

The avenue ended in a small court bounded by columns whose capitals were on friendly terms with a single sultry-growing star that glared evilly. . . . At the base of each pillar was an ornately chiseled pedestal. On eleven of these pedestals, forming a crescent, were life-sized images of bearded men, sitting cross-legged. The head of each was bowed as in sleep; and each held in his left hand a curiously carved scepter.

The sultan started at the sound of hoofs clicking on the pavement behind them.

"Maksoud and his escort." And then, as the hoof-beats ceased: "They fancy this place no more than you do, *saidi*."

The sultan scrutinized the cross-legged, bearded images.

"Strangely life-like," he observed.

"No," contradicted Ismeddin. "Not *strangely* life-like. Rather it would be strange were they otherwise. Nevertheless, seek the girl and her sleeping master. She may tell you how to outwit the Resident and dispose very neatly of Maksoud. But"—Ismeddin glanced again at the disconcerting images—"she may offer a most unusual solution."

In the center of the court was a circular balustrade that guarded the brink of a pit along whose walls spiraled a gently sloping runway down which a man on horse or foot might easily make his way to the abysmal depths that mocked the single star overhead.

"Advance boldly," counseled the darvish, "down the center, not rashly close to the edge, nor timidly close to the wall. And in the meanwhile

I will be here with Maksoud, awaiting your return."

"My return? You are optimistic."

"But with reason," countered Ismeddin. "I myself was once there; and I returned."

"If you are wrong, it will be the first time," conceded the sultan as he began his descent.

"Ismeddin," reflected the sultan, "is doubtless right. And yet I would rather be up there in the courtyard watching him pick his way down and out of sight and into this playground of Shaitan's little sister. Ismeddin would be quite in his element."

DARKNESS did not engulf him as quickly as he had expected. The blackness receded as he descended, and the broad, white tiles gleamed dully ahead of him, so that it was simple enough to keep to the middle of the spiral runway.

From far above came the click-click of horses' hoofs.

The sultan smiled grimly at the thought of Maksoud awaiting a doom that was to emerge from that black pit.

Down . . . down . . . turn after turn . . . until finally the sultan was as far beneath the court as the capitals of its encircling pillars were above it. Then came the scarcely perceptible thump-thump of a drum, and the thin wailing notes of a pipe. An overwhelming, poison sweetness breathed from the blackness and enfolded him.

"By Allah and by Abaddon!" said the sultan to himself, as he paused and half turned. "Vengeance is costly!"

He wiped his brow, and licked his lips; then resolutely advanced.

The spiraling path was curving in ever narrowing circles, vortex-like.

The perfume was now overwhelming.

At the bottom of the pit he found himself facing a low archway that opened into a vault pervaded by glowing vapors whose luminescence throbbed to the cadence of those muttering drums and wailing pipes.

Then a gong sounded once: thinly, as the rustle of silk rather than the resonance of bronze; and the rose-hued mists parted, revealing a girl whose Babylonic eyes gazed through and past him as though he were nebulous as the smoke-wisps of gauze that thinly veiled her loveliness.

A numbness crept over the sultan; all save those intent, sultry eyes was blotted out of existence.

Then she spoke. "Welcome, son of the Old Tiger. You have done well. But unaided you can go no farther."

The girl extended her slender arms and with serpentine passes and gestures stroked his forehead; and then, stepping to his left side, with her knuckles she rapped sharply here and there along his spine, making the lost magic of far-off Tibet, whereby men become gods, and gods become beasts.

Then in softly purring syllables she continued, "You can not cross the threshold to enter the presence of the Lord of the World. Try and see whether I am right."

The sultan sought to advance; but his feet were fixed to the tiles, and a heaviness that forbade all movement possessed him.

Again that soft rippling voice: "You have become as immobile as those eleven who were once kings. And with another pass I could weave about you that silence from the ancient mountains, from which you could not emerge until the end of all time. . . ."

She faced him, regarded him intently, then continued: "But I shall restore you and make you more agile than the fancies of those who eat the plums that grow on the slopes of Mount Kaf."

Whereat she made passes and tapped him as she had done before.

"Now, Schamas ad Din, son of the

Old Tiger, enter the presence of the Lord of the World."

The sultan advanced, marveling that he could not feel the touch of his feet on the floor. The sighing music ceased piping; and as the rose- and saffron-shot mists thinned and drew back and vanished, he found himself in a circular vault on whose domed ceiling glittered stars arranged in strange constellations; and the floor of the vault was not tiled, but strewn with powdered cinnabar. In the center of the vault was a low couch of grotesquely chiseled green basalt on which sat an old man whose head was bowed in sleep.

"Son of the Old Tiger," said the incredible girl at the sultan's side, "you are before the Lord of the World, he who built this prodigious citadel the day he completed the creation of this and all other worlds. He sleeps, and sleeping, dreams; and all things that seem to be are but the figments of his dream; and those things whereof he ceases to dream at that moment cease to be. For nothing is real, save it be the illusion of him who sits here dreaming."

"Then who are you?" queried the sultan.

The girl smiled, and patted the twining, jeweled blackness of her hair.

"I also am illusion, and his masterwork."

"Then if all this be a dream, who and what am I?"

"You too are but one of his fancies; and when he ceases to picture you——"

The sultan shuddered at the girl's gesture of dismissal; but he resumed, "Then if he were to awaken?"

"All things," replied the girl, "would revert to that which existed before he fell asleep. Even I would vanish, just as your dreams when you awaken from them become as nothing."

The girl smiled at the dazed sultan, and continued, "But I shall not and can not vanish, since he can not cease dreaming his most wondrous vision. Nor can he awaken, since I have made his sleep eternal. He ascribed to me all perfection; and thus I have the power which you perceived in my greeting of you. And more than that: it is I who cast a spell over him whose dream I am, so that through the boundless wastes of time he can not awaken; and I can even now whisper in his ear that which I wish him to dream, and straightway his visions create that which I desire."

"Then," deduced the sultan after a long pause, "you are greater than this Lord of the World whose fancy you are?"

The girl stared fixedly as a brooding fate. Then finally she spoke.

"There you have that which few men have ever known: that their illusion transcends and finally conquers them—even as this god is the toy of his own dream, and the prey of an old magic from Tibet."

The sultan gazed intently at the white-bearded Master of Illusion. Then he laughed softly at the simple answer to an insoluble riddle. For a dream, this girl was surprizingly human and reasonable. . . .

"It seems," began the sultan, "that this ancient Lord of the World endowed me with a touch of his own folly. For I have become the plaything of this mad kingdom which the Old Tiger and I dreamed twenty years ago as we sharpened our blades and rode out of the mountains. But not being a god, I may escape my doom."

"And how might that be?" queried the girl.

Her left eyebrow rose ever so slightly. She nodded approvingly at Schamas ad Din.

"You might," suggested the sultan, "whisper into his ear a thought I might whisper into yours."

"In a word, *saidi*," said the girl, "you wish that mad kingdom of yours made a bit more habitable for its ruler? You came seeking vengeance, and end by wanting to recast your entire fate? But that would be unreasonable; for then, in your own way, you would be greater than this very Lord of the World, since even he is subject to me, his dream."

"Wrong!" exclaimed the sultan. "By my beard, you are wrong! I seek but a jest and a vengeance, and let dreams go where they will. Such a vengeance as until a moment ago I had not contemplated or imagined."

"Even as I sought a vengeance and found a jest when I chanted this Dreamer to sleep. *Saidi*, you are a man after my own heart; and your fancy appeals to me. You please me exceedingly. And I think it could be arranged. Yet listen well: in the end you must leave me, and take your place among those who sit motionless in the courtyard above us. The hour is at hand; for there is one here of whom I have for some time been weary, and who will soon occupy the twelfth pedestal."

The girl paused, flung into a censer at the Dreamer's feet a handful of incense, and resumed as she turned to face Schamas ad Din, "But think well, Son of the Old Tiger. A lesser vengeance, and one such as you contemplated when you sought me, could be bought much more cheaply. . . . So back to the courtyard and ponder with clear sky over your head. For only that old rogue of an Ismeddin ever escaped the penalty. . . ."

The girl smiled reminiscently and fondly, then continued, "And it is no jesting matter, this sitting cross-legged on a pedestal when I have tired of you. Nor would Maksoud find a cheaper vengeance at all pleasant."

Yet her eyes belied the discouragement her lips spoke. The sultan ceased comparing her to the women of Gurjestan and Tcherkess, for she was incomparable. Even his jest and his vengeance were trifling. . . .

The sultan disengaged himself from her perfumed embrace.

"Ismeddin is waiting."

And Schamas ad Din ascended the winding incline, smiling and stroking his curled beard.

ISMEDDIN in the meanwhile had led Maksoud, still bound and gagged, and his escort of black mamelukes into the courtyard.

"Father of many little pigs," murmured the darvish, "our lord the Sultan has taken offense at your last display of wretched marksmanship. And since none of his own fancies were worthy of you, he is even now taking counsel with Abaddon of the Black Hands. I expect him any moment, well advised and smiling. So be assured against anything as commonplace as being sawed asunder between two planks."

The Africans had dismounted, and were taking from their packs all manner of implements, as well as cords, flasks of oil, charcoal, and a pair of small bellows. One of them set to work kindling a fire while the other three deftly fitted together mortised and tenoned pieces of dark, heavy wood, assembling a stout frame equipped with hooks, manacles, and shackles.

"It is difficult to say what form the master's fancy will take," resumed Ismeddin, as he approvingly regarded the executioners at their work. But surely it will not be commonplace."

He picked up a keen, two-handed sword, tested its edge and balance.

"Very pretty. But you will have nothing to do with this."

Then, as he noted the four horses tethered to a column: "Ah! . . . now *that*, with certain variations, has real possibilities. You are quite substantial, Maksoud . . . but those horses are sturdy little beasts. . . ."

Ismeddin stroked the neck of a savage Barbary stallion, and continued, "But then, that also is swift. At the best, it lasts but a little over a day, even with the nicest of workmanship," mused the old man.

Ismeddin deftly removed the gag from the prisoner's mouth.

"He can no more than banish me!" sputtered Maksoud. "The Resident would depose him were I not to return. Old ape . . . son of many pork-eating fathers . . . do you think all this parade of curious torments will kill *me* of fright? That is an old story. I myself once helped him——"

And Maksoud's laugh rang true.

"So?" Ismeddin smiled suavely. "Well, and I said that you would meet none of these commonplace things. But supposing . . . just supposing, as food for thought, that we were to let you down into that black pit. You have seen those who have played about these ruins——"

Ismeddin nodded to the black slaves, who advanced to remove the prisoner from his horse.

"Not *that, saidi,*" implored Maksoud.

"That, and more than that. You have seen those who lost their way in these ruins. And you once laughed at what was left of one who finally did find his way out."

The executioners, skilled as they were at handling tormented wretches, kept their hold on Maksoud with difficulty.

And then the cool voice of the sultan, as he emerged from the pit: "Well, Ismeddin, couldn't you wait for me? I heard his howling long before I reached the surface."

"Mercy, O Magnificent! Not into that pit of Iblis!"

"The penalty of poor marksmanship, Maksoud," declared the sultan. "Had you practised in private a few more days, I would not be here deciding your fate."

He smiled and stroked his beard.

"And so you fancied being sultan, did you?" resumed Schamas ad Din. "Those wild fancies are deplorable. Yussuf, here, has devised an entertainment worthy of your bungling; but he shall save it for another."

The chief of the black slaves looked up from his implements, and grinned.

"That pit, master . . . spare me that!"

"Well, and so be it, Maksoud . . . ungrateful son of my brother. But listen: I have devised a doom which will make that pit seem a childish game, and the companions of the pit pleasant playmates. For those whom these ruins have done to death and torment and madness have lived but a month or two of frenzy. But what I have devised——"

He paused, ignoring the prisoner and his pleas. The sultan's smile faded, and his features became drawn and thoughtful. He leaned against the balustrade, and stared at those eleven all too life-like figures squatting on their pedestals of chiseled stone.

The executioners were now supporting rather than holding fast the prisoner. And they themselves, hardened as they were to applying fire and steel, shifted uneasily, and licked their dry lips as they regarded the sultan. And when he turned, they dropped their eyes to avoid his eyes.

Still the sultan did not speak.

His presence was a smoldering doom.

Then a poison sweetness crept up from the mouth of the pit.

From its blacknesses emerged the figure of a bearded king, who solemnly advanced with measured steps, as to the cadence of a slowly beaten drum.

The tongueless executioners dropped their implements, and made horrible, choking grasps at speech.

But as if alone in a desert waste, the presence strode through the

group. His robe brushed Maksoud as he passed toward the other side of the court, bearing in his left hand a strangely carved scepter, and with his right hand stroking his long, curled beard.

Straight across the moon-bathed tiles, and to the twelfth pedestal; and then with infinite care and deliberation, he seated himself cross-legged after the fashion of those eleven all too life-like images.

Very faintly came the sound of a distant gong: not resonant as bronze, but rather as the hissing of a serpent or the rustling of silk.

The sultan started. Then he looked Maksoud full in the eye, and smiled that terrific smile of his father, the Old Tiger.

"Maksoud," he began, "you sought to be king before your day, and forgot my friendship and favor. You could not wait for me to meet my doom on the highroads of Allah. And I shall now punish you by giving you——"

The prisoner choked and gasped.

"Not that, *saidi*——"

"By giving you," continued the sultan, "that which you sought, so that the fullness of possession shall corrode your soul worse than any torment could corrode your body. You shall sit on my lofty throne and publish the orders dictated by an infidel Resident. He shall thwart your vengeances. He shall make a mockery of you, the last remnant of the lordly estate of kings. You shall rule by words rather than by swords."

The sultan drew his simitar.

"Your friends shall seek you with daggers in your gardens. Poison shall lurk in your food and in your thoughts. Bungling marksmen shall never quite attain the mark you will finally wish them to attain. Your enemies will pity you."

The simitar flickered twice, and the stout cords fell from Maksoud's wrists and ankles.

"To horse, Maksoud, and ride to your throne!"

The sultan sheathed his blade, advanced a pace down the spiral pathway of darkness, then paused to listen to the hoofbeats of Maksoud's cavalcade.

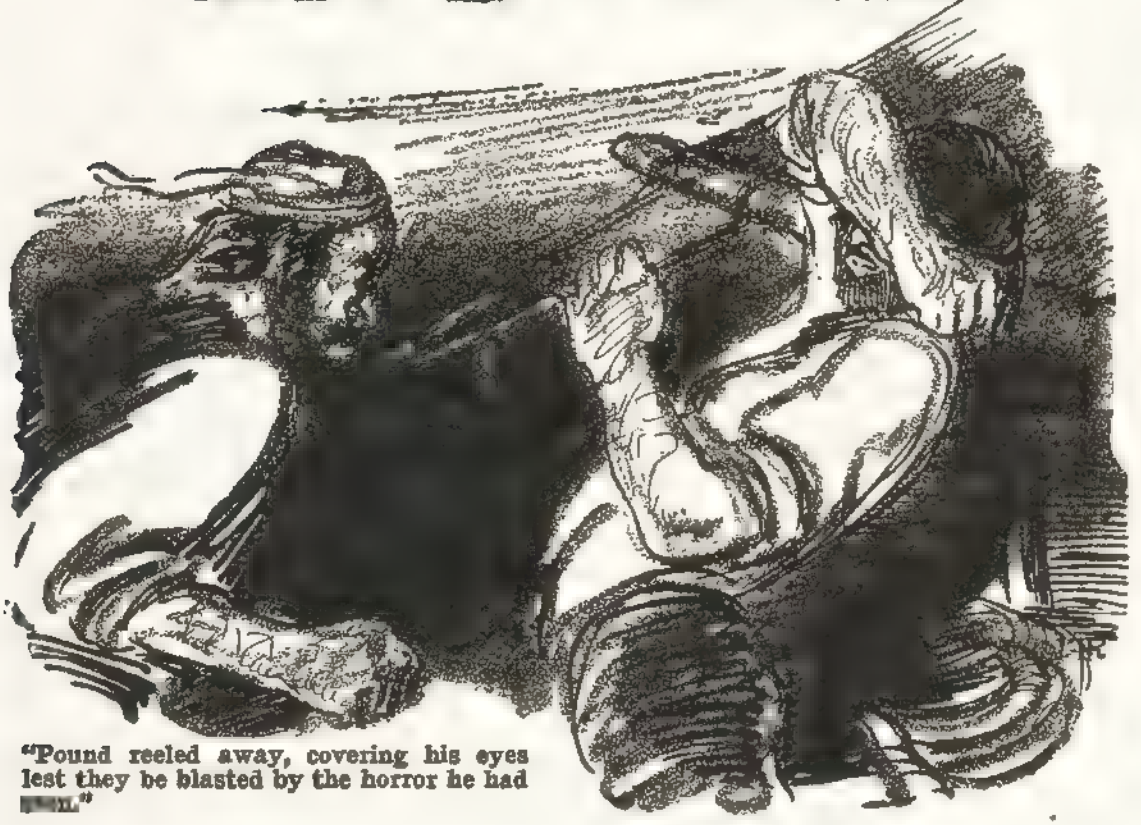
Old Ismeddin leaned over the balustrade.

"A moment, *saidi!* Let your first whisper in the girl's ear ask for *two* British Residents in Angor-lana."

And with a courtly salaam to the master, Ismeddin disappeared among the ruins.

THE LIPS

by HENRY S. WHITEHEAD



"Pound reeled away, covering his eyes lest they be blasted by the horror he had seen."

THE *Saul Taverner*, blackbirder, Luke Martin, master, up from Cartagena, came to her anchor in the harbor of St. Thomas, capital and chief town of the Danish West Indies. A Martinique barkentine berthed to leeward of her, sent a fully manned boat ashore after the harbor-master with a request for permission to change anchorage. Luke Martin's shore boat was only a few lengths behind the Frenchman's. Martin shouted after the officer whom it landed:

"Tell Lollik I'll change places with ye, an' welcome! What ye carryin'—brandy? I'll take six cases off'n ye."

The barkentine's mate, a French-Island mulatto, nodded over his shoulder, and noted down the order in a leather pocketbook without slackening his pace. It was no joyful experience to lie in a semi-enclosed harbor directly to leeward of a slaver, and haste was indicated despite propitiatory orders for brandy. "Very well, Captain," said the mate, stiffly.

Martin landed as the Martinique mate rounded a corner to the left and disappeared from view in the direction of the harbor-master's. Martin scowled after him, muttering to himself.

"Airs! Talkin' English—language of the islands; thinkin' in French, you an' your airs! An' yer gran'-

father came outta a blackbird ship like's not! You an' your airs!''

Reaching the corner the mate had turned, Martin glanced after him momentarily, then turned to the right, mounting a slight rise. His business ashore took him to the fort. He intended to land his cargo, or a portion of it, that night. The colony was short of field hands. With the help of troops from Martinique, French troops, and Spaniards from its nearer neighbor, Porto Rico, it had just put down a bloody uprising on its subsidiary island of St. Jan. Many of the slaves had been killed in the joint armed reprisal of the year 1833.

Luke Martin got his permission to land his cargo, therefore, without difficulty, and, being a Yankee bucko who let no grass grow under his feet, four bells in the afternoon watch saw the hatches off and the decks of the *Saul Taverner* swarming with manacled Blacks for the ceremony of washing-down.

Huddled together, blinking in the glaring sun of a July afternoon under parallel 18, north latitude, the mass of swart humanity were soaped, with handfuls of waste out of soft-soap buckets, scrubbed with brushes on the ends of short handles, and rinsed off with other buckets. Boatloads of Negroes surrounded the ship to see the washing-down, and these were kept at a distance by a swearing third mate told off for the purpose.

By seven bells the washing-down was completed, and before sundown a row of lighters, each guarded by a pair of Danish gendarmes with muskets and fixed bayonets, had ranged alongside for the taking off of the hundred and seventeen Blacks who were to be landed, most of whom would be sent to replenish the laborers on the plantations of St. Jan off the other side of the island of St. Thomas.

The disembarking process began just after dark, to the light of lanterns. Great care was exercised by all concerned lest any escape by plunging overboard. A tally-clerk from shore checked off the Blacks as they went over the side into the lighters, and these, as they became filled, were rowed to the landing-stage by other slaves, bending over six great sweeps in each of the stub-bowed, heavy wooden boats.

Among the huddled black bodies of the very last batch stood a woman, very tall and thin, with a new-born child, black as a coal, at her breasts. The woman stood a little aloof from the others, farther from the low rail of the *Saul Taverner's* forward deck, crooning to her infant. Behind her approached Luke Martin, impatient of his unlading, and cut at her thin ankles with his rhinoceros leather whip. The woman did not wince. Instead, she turned her head and muttered a few syllables in a low tone, in the Eboe dialect. Martin shoved her into the mass of Blacks, cursing roundly as he cut a second time at the spindling shins.

The woman turned, very quietly and softly, as he was passing behind her, let her head fall softly on Martin's shoulder and whispered into his ear. The motion was so delicate as to simulate a caress, but Martin's curse died in his throat. He howled in pain as the woman raised her head, and his whip clattered on the deck boarding while the hand which had held it went to the shoulder. The woman, deftly holding her infant, had moved in among the huddling Blacks, a dozen or more of whom intervened between her and Martin, who hopped on one foot and cursed, a vicious, continuous stream of foul epithets; then, still cursing, made his way in haste to his cabin after an antiseptic, any idea of revenge swallowed up in his superstitious dread of what might happen to him if he did not, forthwith, dress the ghastly wound just under his left ear, where the black woman had caused

her firm, white and shining teeth to meet in the great muscle of his neck between shoulder and jaw.

When he emerged, ten minutes later, the wound now soaked in permanganate of potash, and roughly clotted with a clean cloth, the last lighter, under the impetus of its six sweeps, was half-way ashore, and the clerk of the government, from the fort, was awaiting him, with a bag of coin and a pair of gendarmes to guard it. He accompanied the government clerk below, where, the gendarmes at the cabin door, they figured and added and counted money for the next hour, a bottle of sound rum and a pair of glasses between them.

At two bells, under a shining moon, the *Saul Taverner*, taking advantage of the evening trade wind, was running for the harbor's mouth to stand away for Norfolk, Virginia, whence, empty, she would run up the coast for her home port of Boston, Massachusetts.

It was midnight, what with the care of his ship coming out of even the plain and safe harbor of St. Thomas, before Martin the skipper, Culebra lighthouse off the port quarter, turned in. The wound in the top of his shoulder ached dully, and he sent for Matthew Pound, his first mate, to wash it out with more permanganate and dress it suitably. It was in an awkward place—curse the black slut! —for him to manage it for himself.

Pound went white and muttered under his breath at the ugly sight of it when Martin had removed his shirt, painfully, and eased off the cloth he had roughly laid over it, a cloth now stiff and clotted with the exuding blood drying on its inner surface, from the savage wound.

Thereafter, not liking the look on his mate's face, nor that whitening which the sight of the place in his neck had brought about, Martin dispensed with assistance, and dressed the wound himself.

He slept little that first night, but this was partly for thinking of the bargain he had driven with those short-handed Danes. They had been hard up for black meat to sweat on those hillside canefields over on St. Jan. He could have disposed, easily, of his entire cargo, but that, unfortunately, was out of the question. He had, what with an exceptionally slow and hot voyage across the Caribbean from Cartagena, barely enough of his sad cargo left to fulfil his engagement to deliver a certain number of head in Norfolk. But he would have been glad enough to rid his hold of them all—curse them!—and set his course straight for Boston. He was expecting to be married the day after his arrival. He was eager to get home, and even now the *Saul Taverner* was carrying as much sail as she could stand up under, heeling now to the unfailing trade wind of this latitude.

The wound ached and pained, none the less, and he found it well-nigh impossible to settle himself in a comparatively comfortable position on its account. He tossed and cursed far into the warm night. Toward morning he fell into a fitful doze.

The entire left side of his neck and shoulder was one huge, searing ache when he awakened and pushed himself carefully upright with both hands. He could not bend his head nor, at first, move it from side to side. Dressing was a very painful process, but he managed it. He wanted to see what the bite looked like, but, as he never shaved during a voyage, there was no glass in his cabin. He bathed the sore place gingerly with bay rum, which hurt abominably and caused him to curse afresh. Dressed at last, he made his way up on deck, past the steward who was laying breakfast in his cabin. The steward, he thought, glanced at him curiously, but he could not be sure. No wonder. He had to walk sidewise, with the pain of his neck, like a crab. He ordered more sail, stuns'ls, and, these set and sheet-

ed home, he returned to the cabin for breakfast.

Midafternoon saw him, despite the vessel's more than satisfactory speed and the progress of a long leg toward Boston and Lydia Farnham, in such a devilish temper that everyone on board the ship kept, as far as possible, out of his way. He took no night watches, these being divided among the three mates, and after his solitary supper, punctuated with numerous curses at a more than usually awkward steward, he went into his stateroom, removed his shirt and singlet, and thoroughly rubbed the entire aching area with coconut oil. The pain now ran down his left arm to the elbow, and penetrated to all the cords of his neck, the muscles of which throbbed and burned atrociously.

The embrocation gave him a certain amount of relief. He remembered that the woman had muttered something. It was *not* Eboe, that jargon of *lingua franca* which served as a medium for the few remarks necessary between slavers and their human cattle. It was some outlandish coastal or tribal dialect. He had not caught it, sensed its meaning; though there had resided in those few syllables some germ of deadly meaning. He remembered, vaguely, the cadence of the syllables, even though their meaning had been unknown to him. Weary, aching, depressed, he turned in, and this time, almost immediately, he fell asleep.

And in his sleep, those syllables were repeated to him, into his left ear, endlessly, over and over again, and in his sleep he knew their meaning; and when he awoke, a swaying beam of pouring moonlight coming through his port-hole, at four bells after midnight, the cold sweat had made his pillow clammy wet and stood dankly in the hollows of his eyes and soaked his tangled beard.

Burning from head to foot, he rose and lit the candle in his binnacle-light, and cursed himself again for a fool for not acquiring a mirror through the day. Young Sumner, the third mate, shaved. One or two of the fo'castle hands, too. There would be mirrors on board. He must obtain one tomorrow. What was it the woman had said—those syllables? He shuddered. He could not remember. Why should he remember? Gibberish—nigger-talk! It was nothing. Merely the act of a bestial Black. They were all alike. He should have taken the living hide off the wench. To bite him! Well, painful as it was, it should be well healed before he got back to Boston, and Lydia.

Laboriously, for he was very stiff and sore all along the left side, he climbed back into his bed, after blowing out the binnacle-light. That candle-wick! It was very foul. He should have wet his thumb and finger and pinched it out. It was still smoking.

Then the syllables again, endlessly—over and over, and, now that he slept, and, somehow, knew that he slept and could not carry their meaning into the next waking state, *he knew what they meant.* Asleep, drowned in sleep, he tossed from side to side of his berth-bed, and the cold sweat ran in oily trickles down into his thick beard. . . .

HE AWAKENED in the early light of morning in a state of horrified half-realization. He could not get up, it seemed. The ache now ran all through his body, which felt as though it had been beaten until flayed. One of the brandy bottles from the Martinique barkentine, opened the night of departure from St. Thomas, was within reach. He got it, painfully, drew the cork with his teeth, holding the bottle in his right hand, and took a long, gasping drink of the neat spirit. He could feel it through him like liquid, golden fire. Ah! that was better. He raised the bottle again, set it back where it had been, half empty. He made a great

effort to roll out of the berth, failed, sank back well-nigh helpless, his head humming and singing like a hive of angry bees.

He lay there, semi-stupefied now, vague and dreadful things working within his head, his mind, his body; strange and fearful, dimly envisaged things brewing, seething, there inside him, as though something had entered into him and was growing there where the focus of pain throbbed, in the great muscles of his neck on the left side.

There, an hour later, a timid steward found him, after repeated and unanswered knocks on the stateroom door. The steward had at last ventured to open the door a mere peeping-slit, and then, softly closing it behind him, and white-faced, hastened to find Pound, the first mate.

Pound, after consultation with the second mate, Sumner, accompanied the steward to the stateroom door, opening off the captain's cabin. Even there, hard bucko that he was, he hesitated. No one aboard the *Saul Taverner* approached Captain Luke Martin with a sense of ease or anything like self-assurance. Pound repeated the steward's door-opening, peeped within, and thereafter entered the cabin, shutting the door.

Martin lay on his right side, the bed-clothes pushed down to near his waist. He slept in his singlet, and the left side of his neck was uppermost. Pound looked long at the wound, his face like chalk, his hands and lips trembling. Then he softly departed, shutting the door behind him a second time, and went thoughtfully up on deck again. He sought out young Sumner and the two spoke together for several minutes. Then Sumner went below to his cabin, and, emerging on the deck, looked furtively all around him. Observing the coast clear, he drew from beneath his drill jacket something twice the size of his hand, and, again glancing about to make sure he was not observed, dropped the article overboard. It flashed in the bright morning sun as it turned about in the air before the waters received it forever. It was his small cabin shaving-mirror.

AT FOUR bells in the forenoon, Pound again descended to the captain's cabin. This time Martin's voice, a weak voice, answered his discreet knock and at its invitation he entered the stateroom. Martin now lay on his back, his left side away from the door.

"How are you feeling, sir?" asked Pound.

"Better," murmured Martin; "this damned thing!" He indicated the left side of his neck with a motion of his right thumb. "I got some sleep this morning. Just woke up, just now. It's better—the worst of it over, I reckon."

A pause fell between the men. There seemed nothing more to say. Finally, after several twitches and fidgeting, Pound mentioned several details about the ship, the surest way to enlist Martin's interest at any time. Martin replied, and Pound took his departure.

Martin had spoken the truth when he alleged he was better. He had awakened with a sense that the worst was over. The wound ached abominably still, but the unpleasantness was distinctly lessened. He got up, rather languidly, slowly pulled on his deck clothes, called for coffee through the stateroom door.

Yet, when he emerged on his deck ten minutes later, his face was drawn and haggard, and there was a look in his eyes that kept the men silent. He looked over the ship professionally, the regular six bells morning inspection, but he was preoccupied and his usual intense interest in anything concerned with his ship was this day merely perfunctory. For, nearly constantly now that the savage pain was somewhat allayed and tending to grow less as the deck exercise cleared his mind and body of their poisons,

those last syllables, the muttered syllables in his left ear when the Black woman's head had lain for an instant on his shoulder, those syllables which were not in Eboe, kept repeating themselves to him. It was as though they were constantly reiterated in his physical ear rather than merely mentally; vague syllables, with one word, *"l'kundu,"* standing out and pounding itself deeper and deeper into his consciousness.

"Hearin' things!" he muttered to himself as he descended to his cabin on the conclusion of the routine morning inspection a half-hour before noon. He did not go up on deck again for the noon observations. He remained, sitting very quietly there in his cabin, listening to what was being whispered over and over again in his left ear, the ear above the wound in his neck muscle.

It was highly unusual for this full-blooded bucko skipper to be quiet as his cabin steward roundly noted. The explanation was, however, very far from the steward's mind. He imagined that the wound had had a devastating effect upon the captain's nerves, and so far his intuition was a right one. But beyond that the steward's crude psychology did not penetrate. He would have been skeptical, amused, scornful, had anyone suggested to him the true reason for this unaccustomed silence and quietude on the part of his employer. Captain Luke Martin, for the first time in his heady and truculent career, was frightened.

He ate little for his midday dinner, and immediately afterward retired to his stateroom. He came out again, almost at once, however, and mounted the cabin ladder to the after deck. The *Saul Taverner,* carrying a heavy load of canvas, was spanking along at a good twelve knots. Martin looked aloft, like a sound sailorman, when he emerged on deck, but his preoccupied gaze came down and seemed to young Sumner, who touched his hat to him, to look inward. Martin was addressing him.

"I want the lend of your lookin'-glass," said he in quiet tones.

Young Sumner started, felt the blood leave his face. This was what Pound had warned him about; why he had thrown his glass over the side.

"Sorry, sir. It ain't along with me this v'yage, sir. I had it till we lay in St. Thomas. But now it's gone. I couldn't shave this mornin', sir." The young mate made an evidential gesture, rubbing a sun-burned hand across his day's growth of beard on a weak but not unhandsome face.

He expected a bull-like roar of annoyance from the captain. Instead Martin merely nodded absently, and walked forward. Sumner watched him interestedly until he reached the hatch leading to the crew's quarters below decks forward. Then:

"Cripes! He'll get one from Dave Sloan!" And young Sumner ran to find Pound and tell him that the captain would probably have a looking-glass within a minute. He was very curious to know the whys and wherefores of his senior mate's unusual request about his own looking-glass. He had obeyed, but he wanted to know; for here, indeed, was something very strange. Pound had merely told him the captain mustn't see that wound in his neck, which was high enough up so that without a glass he could not manage to look at it.

Pound was devastated when he heard the news. He swore softly, and sat, head on hands, his elbows on his tiny cabin table. "God," he murmured, and again—"God!"

Young Sumner's curiosity was aroused to a very high pitch at this. He summoned up his courage.

"What's it like, Mr. Pound," he ventured to enquire.

"It's wot you'd name kinder livid-like," returned Pound, slowly. "It's a kind of purplish. Looks like—nigger lips!"

BACK in his stateroom, Martin, after closing the door leading to the cabin, started to take off his shirt. He was half-way through this operation when he was summoned on deck. He hastily readjusted the shirt, almost shamefacedly, as though discovered in some shameful act, and mounted the ladder. Pound engaged him for twenty minutes, ship matters. He gave his decisions in the same half-hearted voice which was so new to those about him, and descended again.

The bit of mirror-glass which he had borrowed from Sloan in the fo'castle was gone from his washstand. He looked, painfully, all over the cabin for it, but it was not there. Ordinarily such a thing happening would have elicited a very tempest of raging curses. Now he sat down, almost helplessly, and stared about the stateroom with unseeing eyes. But not with unheeding ears! The voice was speaking English now, no longer gibberish syllables grouped about the one clear word, *"l'kundu."* The voice in his left ear was compelling, tense, repentive. "Over the side," it was repeating to him, and again, and yet again, "Over the side!"

He sat there a long time. Then, at last, perhaps an hour later, his face, which there was no one by to see, now pinched, drawn and gray in the bold, challenging afternoon light in the white-painted stateroom, he rose, slowly, and with almost furtive motions began to pull off his shirt.

He got it off, laid it on his berth, drew off the light singlet which he wore under it, and slowly, tentatively, with his right hand, reached for the wound in his neck. As his hand approached it, he felt cold and weak. At last his hand, fingers groping, touched the sore and tender area of the wound, felt about, found the wound itself. . . .

It was Pound who found him, two hours later, huddled in a heap on the cramped floor of the stateroom, naked to the waist, unconscious.

It was Pound, hard old Pound, who laboriously propped the captain's great bulk—for he was a heavy-set man, standing six feet in height—into his chair, pulled the singlet and then the discarded shirt over his head and then poured brandy between his bluish lips. It required half an hour of the mate's rough restoratives, brandy, chafing of the hands, slapping the limp, huge wrists, before Captain Luke Martin's eyelids fluttered and the big man gradually came awake.

But Pound found the monosyllabic answers to his few, brief questions cryptic, inappropriate. It was as though Martin were answering someone else, some other voice.

"I will," he said, wearily, and again, "Yes, I will!"

It was then, looking him up and down in considerable puzzlement, that the mate saw the blood on the fingers of his right hand, picked up the great, heavy hand now lying limply on the arm of the stateroom chair.

The three middle fingers had been bleeding for some time. The blood from them was now dry and clotted. Pound, picking up the hand, examining it in the light of the lowering afternoon sun, saw that these fingers had been savagely cut, or, it looked like, *sawed*. It was as though the saw-teeth that had ground and torn them had grated along their bones. It was a ghastly wound.

Pound, trembling from head to foot, fumbling about the medicine case, mixed a bowl of permanganate solution, soaked the unresisting hand, bound it up. He spoke to Martin several times, but Martin's eyes were looking at something far away, his ears deaf to his mate's words. Now and again he nodded his head acquiescently, and once more, before old Pound left him, sitting there, limply, he muttered, "Yes, yes!—I will, I will!"

Pound visited him again just before four bells in the early evening,

supper time. He was still seated, looking, somehow, shrunken, apathetic.

"Supper, Captain?" inquired Pound tentatively. Martin did not raise his eyes. His lips moved, however, and Pound bent to catch what was being said.

"Yes, yes, yes," said Martin, "I will, I will—yes, I will!"

"It's laid in the cabin, sir," ventured Pound, but he got no reply, and he slipped out, closing the door behind him.

"The captain's sick, Maguire," said Pound to the little steward. "You might as well take down the table and all that, and then go forward as soon as you're finished."

"Ay, ay, sir," replied the wondering steward, and proceeded to unset the cabin table according to these orders. Pound saw him through with these duties, followed him out on deck, saw that he went forward as directed. Then he returned, softly.

He paused outside the stateroom door, listened. There was someone talking in there, someone besides the skipper—a thick voice, like one of the Negroes, but very faint; thick, guttural, but light; a voice like a young boy's, or—a woman's. Pound, stupefied, listened, his ear now directly against the door. He could not catch, through that thickness, what was being said, but it was in form, by the repeated sounds, the captain's voice alternating with the light, guttural voice, clearly a conversation, like question and answer, question and answer. The ship had no boy. Of women there were a couple of dozen, but all of them were battened below, under hatches, Black women, down in the stinking manhold. Besides, the captain—there could not be a woman in there with him. No woman, no one at all, could have got in. The stateroom had been occupied only by the captain when he had left it fifteen minutes before. He had not been out of sight of the closed door all that time. Yet—he listened the more intently, his mind now wholly intrigued by this strange riddle.

He caught the cadence of Martin's words, now, the same cadence, he knew instinctively, as that of the broken sentence he had been repeating to him in his half-dazed state while he was binding up those gashed fingers. Those fingers! He shuddered. The *Saul Taverner* was a hell-ship. None was better aware of that than he, who had largely contributed, through many voyages in her, to that sinister reputation she bore, but — this! This was something like real hell.

"Yes, yes—I will, I will, I will——" that was the swing, the tonal cadence of what Martin was saying at more or less regular intervals in there; then the guttural, light voice—the two going on alternately, one after the other, no pauses in that outlandish conversation.

ABRUPTLY the conversation ceased. It was as though a sound-proof door had been pulled down over it. Pound straightened himself up, waited a minute, then knocked on the door.

The door was abruptly thrown open from inside, and Captain Luke Martin, his eyes glassy, unseeing, stepped out, Pound giving way before him. The captain paused in the middle of his cabin, looking about him, his eyes still bearing that "unseeing" look. Then he made his way straight toward the companion ladder. He was going up on deck, it seemed. His clothes hung on him now, his shirt awry, his trousers crumpled and seamed where he had lain on the floor, sat, huddled up, in the small chair where Pound had placed him.

Pound followed him up the ladder.

Once on deck, he made his way straight to the port rail, and stood, looking, still as though "unseeingly," out over the billowing waves. It was dark now; the sub-tropic dusk had lately fallen. The ship was quiet save for the noise of her sharp bows as they cut through the middle North Atlan-

tic swell on her twelve-knot way to Virginia.

Suddenly old Pound sprang forward, grappled with Martin. The captain had started to climb the rail—suicide, that was it, then—those voices!

The thwarting of what seemed to be his purpose aroused Martin at last. Behind him lay a middle-aged man's lifetime of command, of following his own will in all things. He was not accustomed to being thwarted, to any resistance which, aboard his own ship, always went down, died still-born, before his bull-like bellow, his truculent fists.

He grappled in turn with his mate, and a long, desperate, and withal a silent struggle began there on the deck, lighted only by the light from the captain's cabin below, the light of the great binnacle lamp of whale oil, through the sky-lights set above-decks for daytime illumination below.

In the course of that silent, deadly struggle, Pound seeking to drag the captain back from the vicinity of the rail, the captain laying about him with vicious blows, the man became rapidly disheveled. Martin had been coatless, and a great swath of his white shirt came away in the clutching grip of Pound, baring his neck and left shoulder.

Pound slackened, let go, shrank and reeled away, covering his eyes lest they be blasted from their sockets by the horror which he had seen.

For there, where the shirt had been torn away and exposed the side of Martin's neck, stood a pair of blackish-purple, perfectly formed, blubbery lips; and as he gazed, appalled, horrified, the lips had opened in a wide yawn, exposing great, shining African teeth, from between which, before he could bury his face in his hands away from this horror, a long, pink tongue had protruded and licked the lips. . . .

And when old Pound, shaking now to his very marrow, cold with the horror of this dreadful portent there on the deck warm with the pulsing breath of the trade wind, had recovered himself sufficiently to look again toward the place where the master of the *Saul Taverner* had struggled with him there against the railing, that place stood empty and no trace of Luke Martin so much as ruffled the phosphorescent surface of the *Saul Taverner's* creaming wake.

THE LIVING

By LOUISE GARWOOD

She can not smell those roses. She can not even see.
Take them off her coffin! Give them to me!
Henceforth her lips and eyes are food to make the rose more fair,
And when she blooms I'll take her and wear her in my hair.

A Ghost Tale of the Sea

Warning Wings

By ARLTON EADIE

"STEADY, sir! Please don't do that."

Quietly as the words were uttered, their tone of urgent entreaty was such that I stopped dead and allowed my hand — already raised to crush the moth which had for the past half-hour been blindly dashing itself against the bulb of the electric table-lamp—to fall limply to my side. Surprized at the unexpected exclamation, and secretly somewhat amused at his evident concern for the life of the fluttering insect, I turned and faced the speaker.

He was a fresh arrival at the hotel, for his face was unfamiliar to me. Tall and broad-shouldered, with a neatly trimmed, pointed gray beard, his features tanned to that warm, even tone which only the sea can give —one does not need to spend many hours in the neighborhood of the Southampton water-front before becoming accustomed to the type to which he belonged. Evidently he was an officer of one of the ocean liners which are to be counted by the score in the docks near by. There was a flicker of amusement in his keen gray eyes as he stepped forward in answer to my look of surprize.

"Seemingly this little wanderer of the night has incurred your displeasure," he observed, pointing to the moth which had now renewed its frantic dashes against the brightly lit globe.

"It seemed so determined to beat its life out that I thought it only kindness to end its misery," I shrugged.

The stranger shook his head slightly. "There is another way."

He stepped toward the lamp and after several attempts managed to catch the little creature between his cupped hands. Then, holding it with infinite tenderness, he crossed to the open window and allowed it to flutter away into the summer night. As he turned, after shutting the window, I saw that he was regarding me with a queer little half smile.

"You may think it strange that I should take the trouble to preserve the life of an insect that another man would crush without a second thought," he said. "But I have a fondness for moths, especially of that particular kind. Oh, you mustn't run away with the idea that I'm a learned entomologist," he went on with a laugh. "As a matter of fact, I do not know the scientific name of the species, although its common designation is, I believe, the 'Ghost Moth'. No, sir, my action just now was purely sentimental. The sight of those tiny fluttering wings brought back the memory of a strange adventure which I had in mid-Atlantic, many years ago."

A far-away expression had crept into his eyes, only to vanish the next moment as he turned again to me and resumed briskly:

"If I tell you the story, it may serve for both explanation and excuse for my unwarrantable intrusion just now."

I hastened to assure him that no excuse was necessary; but at the same time I hinted rather strongly that I

should be glad to hear the account of what had happened. To confess the truth, I was not a little curious to know why such a strong bond of sympathy existed between this clear-eyed matter-of-fact man of the world and the little white moth. Sailors' yarns are seldom uninteresting to a landsman, and occasionally they are true as well. Whether this one comes in the latter category I am unable to guarantee; but I can vouch for the fact that the teller of it did not look like a man who would gain any satisfaction from "twisting the ankle" of a casual stranger. As I listened to the story being told in his deep, earnest voice, glancing occasionally into the speaker's frank, bronzed face, I know that I believed every word of it.

"At the present time I am in command of the R. M. S. S."—he mentioned the name of a famous Atlantic flyer which had arrived at Southampton the previous day—"but at the time of which I am about to speak, some twenty years since, I was in charge of a smaller vessel belonging to the same line. I was a youngish man then—as liner-captains go—and she was my first command. But you must not imagine that I was nervous on that account, for I'd been in the ferrying trade ever since I'd taken my third-mate's ticket, and I flattered myself that I knew the 'lane' blindfold.

"I suppose it sounds strange to you when I speak of a 'lane' across the Western Ocean. If you talk about the sea to the average landsman, he conjures up a vision of 'the trackless deep,' a phrase which he has learnt from story-writers who have more poetical imagination than actual seagoing experience. True, there was a time when the shipmaster was left free to set his course by the most direct route from port to port, and especially was this so in the days when the competition between the different shipping companies led their captains to strain every nerve to secure the speed-record for their particular ships. But all that is changed now. With the furnaces of a modern liner eating up a ton of coal every one-and-a-half minutes—to say nothing of the food and wages bills mounting up—it is essential for the captain to maintain speed, and the man who takes a 43-000-tonner at twenty-five knots through the zone of drifting icebergs, and the fogs which lay over the Grand Banks in summer, is simply asking for trouble. Consequently two 'lanes' are marked out on his chart; the 'northern' and most direct seapassage, to be followed when the icebergs are bound up by the Greenland winter and the fog zone off the Grand Banks is of smaller area; and the 'southern,' which is calculated to pass outside the limit to which the bergs drift before melting, and to avoid the larger fog area over the Banks. For the Southampton boats the course is set from the Lizard; those coming from Liverpool set theirs when they drop the Fastnet Light, off the southwest coast of Ireland; while those coming 'north about' through the Pentland Firth steer from a spot well to the nor'rad of the rocky islet of Rockall. And once the course is set, the helm is not shifted unless it is in response to a signal of distress.

"It is necessary for me to make these details quite clear in order for you to appreciate the position of difficulty in which I found myself during the particular voyage I am about to describe.

"It was June when we sailed from this port, so we were due to take the southern route. We stood down Channel until the Bishop Light was winking away on our starboard beam—it stands on an outlying reef of the Scilly Isles, and is the last beacon you pass sailing west—then the course was set 'West, three-quarters South,' which brought the ship into the usual summer route. A little over three days' steaming brought us into the

neighborhood of thirty-five degrees of longitude west of Greenwich. At this point our track met the track of the Liverpool and Queenstown boats, and, according to schedule, our bows were pointed farther south, which made our course 'West-South-West.' You must understand that I'm describing the track we followed twenty years ago. Since the *Titanic* disaster in 1912 the route has been altered, so that it now swings more to the southward until it reaches the same latitude as the Azores, after which it curves north again to New York.

"Well, we shifted our helm, as I have said, about one bell in the first watch (8:30 p. m. shore time), and shortly afterward I came off the bridge to turn in. I took a last look round before going below. It was one of those perfect nights which make passengers think that a sailor's life is all beer and skittles. The ship was threshing her way over the gentle swell with scarce a tilt showing on her long lines of decks; the stars shone bright in the cloudless sky; the slight following breeze was hardly strong enough to lift the drooping folds of the ensign at our stern. It seemed that on such a night the most nervous of new-fledged captains might sleep in peace. Certainly no thought of sudden and unexpected disaster was in my mind when I threw myself down on my cot to sleep.

"But for some unaccountable reason sleep would not come to me. I tossed restlessly from side to side; got up and opened the ports of my cabin; closed them again; tried the old trick of counting the steady beats of the throbbing propeller. But all in vain. In spite of my effort to overcome it, the sense of expectant wakefulness seemed to increase rather than diminish. At last I gave up the struggle, and, switching on the light, took a book from the rack and settled myself to read. It was then that I noticed for the first time a vague sound mingling with the familiar noises of the ship.

"At first it seemed nothing more than a soft intermittent tapping, but as I continued to listen I noticed that the same number of taps was repeated again and again. Subconsciously at first, but soon with awakened interest, I realized that the sounds fitted into certain letters of the Morse code. I laid the book aside and sat up, listening.

"*Tap-tap-tap—Tap . . . tap . . . tap—Tap-tap-tap.*

"I raised my eyes to the spot whence the sound proceeded and at once saw what was causing it. Attracted by the light, a tiny white moth had entered the porthole and was now fluttering frantically against the illuminated dial of the telltale compass that was fixed in the ceiling above my bed. The soft tapping had been caused by the creature dashing itself against the glass in its effort to reach the light within. I smiled to myself as I saw the commonplace explanation of the sounds which had so puzzled me; but at the same time I could not help being struck by the fact that the noise it was making was strangely like the Morse code.

"But I was in no mood to be kept awake by so trivial a thing. Picking the towel from the rack, I mounted on the cot and raised my hand to sweep the little creature out of existence, even as you were about to crush that other moth in this room a few minutes since. But just as I was about to strike, the moth's flutterings began afresh.

"*Tap-tap-tap—Tap . . . tap . . . tap—Tap-tap-tap.*

"I stood like a man turned to stone as the real meaning of this chance-spelt signal rushed upon me. It was 'S O S'—the sailors' call for help!

"Nor was this all. I had already noticed that the creature had come to rest in the same position every time it had finished the ninth stroke, but

now I saw that its head was resting on the compass at almost exactly the same point where our present course lay. The difference was only a quarter of a point to the southward; that is to say, we were heading 'West-South-West,' whereas the course indicated by the moth was 'West-South-West, *quarter South.*'

"Even as I stood staring the signal was repeated. The light feathery wings beat the air once more; again came the three rapid taps, the pause, the three slower taps, another pause, and then the three final taps in quick succession. Again the creature alighted on the glass with its head resting on the same quarter-point of the compass.

"Now, I'm not naturally a superstitious man, but I don't mind admitting that I felt a very curious feeling stealing over me as I stood alone in that cabin and watched that little grayish-white insect spell out the signal which is never sent out unless a vessel be in dire straits, and then come to rest pointing so unerringly to a course so near our own. It was useless for me to try to persuade myself that it was pure coincidence; that the three fluttering taps might be the natural movements of the moth; that there might be something on the covering-glass of the compass which would account for the thing always seeking the same spot. Try as I might, I could not get it out of my head that the little moth was trying to tell me to shift my helm a quarter of a point to the south.

"Still, one does not act on impulse when in charge of an ocean liner, nor does one depart from the specified track without good cause. First of all I must make sure that my imagination was not playing a trick on me. I slipped on my uniform and quietly made my way aft to the First Officer's berth. McAndrew was a hard-headed and eminently practical Scot in whose sound common sense I felt I could trust in such a case as this. He was asleep, but his eyes snapped open the instant I laid my hand on his shoulder.

"'Anything wrong, sir?' he cried as he recognized me.

"'Not exactly,' I answered. 'But I want your advice on a little matter that's been troubling me a bit.'

"Mac looked a little surprized, but he was a good deal more so when I led the way to my cabin and pointed to the compass.

"'Why, it's naething but a wee bit moth,' he cried. 'They call them "ghaistie-flutters" up where I was born, them being white, ye see——'

"I interrupted him by holding up my hand.

"'Watch—and listen,' I said, purposely refraining from telling him what to expect in case it should unconsciously influence his judgment.

"As I spoke a slight movement began to agitate the soft, downy wings, and presently:

"*Tap-tap-tap—Tap . . . tap . . . tap—Tap-tap-tap.*

"McAndrew glanced round at me when the wings had become still.

"'If I'd ha' heard that on a wireless receiver I'd have thought I was listening to an "S O S,",' he said slowly.

"'It's been rapping out the same three letters for the past half-hour,' I told him. 'And every time it has come to rest over the same point of the compass.'

"He craned his neck upward and I saw him start.

"'Guid preserve us!' he jerked out. 'The wee beastie is heading within a quarter of a point of our ain course!'

"I nodded silently, for the moth was again repeating its strange message.

"'West-South-West, quarter South,' I read as the frail wings ceased quivering. 'And I'm very much tempted to follow the new course.'

"He gave me a long, searching look before replying.

"'Yon is a matter aboot which nae man can advise another, sir,' he said at length. 'It's something clean beyond the rules of seamanship and navigation. But speaking for myself, sir, if I were in command of this packet I'd shift my helm to the quarter where yon puir beastie seems trying to guide us.'

"I stood for a long while in thought after he had finished speaking. A young master mariner can make or mar his reputation on his first trip. I had been given the command over the heads of older and more experienced men, and I well knew that my conduct would be closely and jealously watched, and, if needs be, criticized. If I were to veer out of the usual track and ill came of it, I would be a marked man for the rest of my life—and I'd seen too many out-of-work shipmasters kicking their heels round the agents' offices not to know what *that* meant. On the other hand, there was the little white moth fluttering out the message that no sailor worth his salt can listen to unmoved, and pointing persistently to the south. I was not a man who loved taking chances, but—for good or ill—I determined to take one then.

"I turned briskly.

"'Pass the word to the quartermaster, Mr. McAndrew,' I ordered. 'The course is "West-South-West, *quarter South*"!'

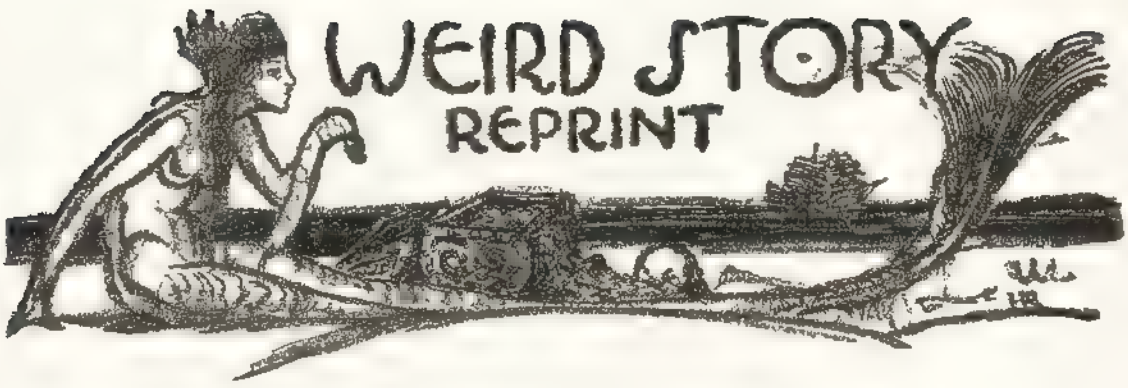
"'Quarter South it is, sir,' the old Scotsman returned, with glistening eyes. Then he raised his hand and touched his cap reverently. 'May the good Lord reward ye if ye're doing right—and may He help ye if ye're not!'

"He went out on the bridge, and a few seconds after I saw the 'lubber-line,' which coincides with the head of the ship, veer round until it came abreast of the spot where the moth was resting, showing that we had swung on to the new course.

"Almost at the same moment, as though it knew that its mission had been accomplished, the little moth fell to the deck, quivered for an instant, and then was still for ever. I gently lifted the little dead messenger, placed it in an empty matchbox, and stowed it away in my locker. I have it still, and sometimes, when things go wrong and the world seems to be just a huge ant-hill of humanity ruled by blind chance and brute instincts, I take out that matchbox and look upon the tiny white moth that came to me in mid-Atlantic . . . and my faith is restored.

"For, thirty-six hours after changing course, we sighted the old *Rangoon*, outward-bound and crowded, and blazing from bridge to stern. Over a thousand souls lived to bless the change of course indicated by that little winged messenger, and among them was the lady who is now my wife. . . .

"And that's why I have a tender spot in my heart for the little light-blinded creatures which flutter in out of the night."



The Hound*

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

IN MY tortured ears there sounds unceasingly a nightmare whirring and flapping, and a faint, distant baying as of some gigantic hound. It is not dream—it is not, I fear, even madness—for too much has already happened to give me these merciful doubts.

St. John is a mangled corpse; I alone know why, and such is my knowledge that I am about to blow out my brains for fear I shall be mangled in the same way. Down unlit and illimitable corridors of eldritch fantasy sweeps the black, shapeless Nemesis that drives me to self-annihilation.

May heaven forgive the folly and morbidity which led us both to so monstrous a fate! Wearied with the commonplaces of a prosaic world, where even the joys of romance and adventure soon grow stale, St. John and I had followed enthusiastically every esthetic and intellectual movement which promised respite from our devastating ennui. The enigmas of the symbolists and the ecstasies of the pre-Raphaelites all were ours in their time, but each new mood was drained too soon of its diverting novelty and appeal.

Only the somber philosophy of the decadents could hold us, and this we found potent only by increasing gradually the depth and diabolism of our penetrations. Baudelaire and Huysmans were soon exhausted of thrills, till finally there remained for us only the more direct stimuli of unnatural personal experiences and adventures. It was this frightful emotional need which led us eventually to that detestable course which even in my present fear I mention with shame and timidity—that hideous extremity of human outrage, the abhorred practise of grave-robbing.

I can not reveal the details of our shocking expeditions, or catalogue even partly the worst of the trophies adorning the nameless museum we prepared in the great stone house where we jointly dwelt, alone and servantless. Our museum was a blasphemous, unthinkable place, where with the satanic taste of neurotic virtuosi we had assembled an universe of terror and decay to excite our jaded sensibilities. It was a secret room, far, far underground; where huge winged demons carven of basalt and onyx vomited from wide grinning mouths weird green and orange light, and hidden pneumatic pipes ruffled into kaleidoscopic dances of death the lines of red charnel things hand in

* From WEIRD TALES, February, 1924.

hand woven on voluminous black hangings. Through these pipes came at will the odors our moods craved; sometimes the scent of pale funereal lilies, sometimes the narcotic incense of imagined Eastern shrines of the kingly dead, and sometimes—how I shudder to recall it!—the frightful, soul-upheaving stenches of the uncovered grave.

Around the walls of this repellent chamber were cases of antique mummies alternating with comely, life-like bodies perfectly stuffed and cured by the taxidermist's art, and with headstones snatched from the oldest churchyards of the world. Niches here and there contained skulls of all shapes, and heads preserved in various stages of dissolution. There one might find the rotting, bald pates of famous noblemen, and the fresh and radiantly golden heads of new-buried children.

Statues and paintings there were, all of fiendish subjects and some executed by St. John and myself. A locked portfolio, bound in tanned human skin, held certain unknown and unnamable drawings which it was rumored Goya had perpetrated but dared not acknowledge. There were nauseous musical instruments, stringed, brass, and wood-wind, on which St. John and I sometimes produced dissonances of exquisite morbidity and cacodemoniacal ghastliness; whilst in a multitude of inlaid ebony cabinets reposed the most incredible and unimaginable variety of tomb-loot ever assembled by human madness and perversity. It is of this loot in particular that I must not speak—thank God I had the courage to destroy it long before I thought of destroying myself!

The predatory excursions on which we collected our unmentionable treasures were always artistically memorable events. We were no vulgar ghouls, but worked only under certain conditions of mood, landscape, environment, weather, season and moonlight. These pastimes were to us the most exquisite form of esthetic expression, and we gave their details a fastidious technical care. An inappropriate hour, a jarring lighting effect, or a clumsy manipulation of the damp sod, would almost totally destroy for us that ecstatic titillation which followed the exhumation of some ominous, grinning secret of the earth. Our quest for novel scenes and piquant conditions was feverish and insatiate—St. John was always the leader, and he it was who led the way at last to that mocking, accursed spot which brought us our hideous and inevitable doom.

By what malign fatality were we lured to that terrible Holland churchyard? I think it was the dark rumor and legendry, the tales of one buried for five centuries, who had himself been a ghoul in his time and had stolen a potent thing from a mighty sepulcher. I can recall the scene in these final moments—the pale autumnal moon over the graves, casting long, horrible shadows; the grotesque trees, drooping sullenly to meet the neglected grass and the crumbling slabs; the vast legions of strangely colossal bats that flew against the moon; the antique ivied church pointing a huge spectral finger at the livid sky; the phosphorescent insects that danced like death-fires under the yews in a distant corner; the odors of mold, vegetation, and less explicable things that mingled feebly with the night-wind from over far swamps and seas; and, worst of all, the faint deep-toned baying of some gigantic hound which we could neither see nor definitely place. As we heard this suggestion of baying we shuddered, remembering the tales of the peasantry; for he whom we sought had centuries before been found in this selfsame spot, torn and mangled by the claws and teeth of some unspeakable beast.

I remember how we delved in this ghoul's grave with our spades, and

how we thrilled at the picture of ourselves, the grave, the pale watching moon, the horrible shadows, the grotesque trees, the titanic bats, the antique church, the dancing death-fires, the sickening odors, the gently moaning night-wind, and the strange, half-heard, directionless baying, of whose objective existence we could scarcely be sure.

Then we struck a substance harder than the damp mold, and beheld a rotting oblong box crusted with mineral deposits from the long undisturbed ground. It was incredibly tough and thick, but so old that we finally pried it open and feasted our eyes on what it held.

Much—amazingly much—was left of the object despite the lapse of five hundred years. The skeleton, though crushed in places by the jaws of the thing that had killed it, held together with surprizing firmness, and we gloated over the clean white skull with its long firm teeth and its eyeless sockets that once had glowed with a charnel fever like our own. In the coffin lay an amulet of curious and exotic design, which had apparently been worn around the sleeper's neck. It was the oddly conventionalized figure of a crouching winged hound, or sphinx with a semi-canine face, and was exquisitely carved in antique Oriental fashion from a small piece of green jade. The expression on its features was repellent in the extreme, savoring at once of death, bestiality, and malevolence. Around the base was an inscription in characters which neither St. John nor I could identify; and on the bottom, like a maker's seal, was graven a grotesque and formidable skull.

Immediately upon beholding this amulet we knew that we must possess it; that this treasure alone was our logical pelf from the centuried grave. Even had its outlines been unfamiliar we would have desired it, but as we looked more closely we saw that it was not wholly unfamiliar. Alien it indeed was to all art and literature which sane and balanced readers know, but we recognized it as the thing hinted of in the forbidden *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred; the ghastly soul-symbol of the corpse-eating cult of inaccessible Leng, in Central Asia. All too well did we trace the sinister lineaments described by the old Arab demonologist; lineaments, he wrote, drawn from some obscure supernatural manifestation of the souls of those who vexed and gnawed at the dead.

Seizing the green jade object, we gave a last glance at the bleached and cavern-eyed face of its owner and closed up the grave as we found it. As we hastened from the abhorrent spot, the stolen amulet in St. John's pocket, we thought we saw the bats descend in a body to the earth we had so lately rifled, as if seeking for some cursed and unholy nourishment. But the autumn moon shone weak and pale, and we could not be sure.

So, too, as we sailed the next day away from Holland to our home, we thought we heard the faint distant baying of some gigantic hound in the background. But the autumn wind moaned sad and wan, and we could not be sure.

2

Less than a week after our return to England, strange things began to happen. We lived as recluses; devoid of friends, alone, and without servants in a few rooms of an ancient manor-house on a bleak and unfrequented moor; so that our doors were seldom disturbed by the knocks of the visitor.

Now, however, we were troubled by what seemed to be frequent fumblings in the night, not only around the doors but around the windows also, upper as well as lower. Once we fancied that a large, opaque body darkened the library window when the moon was shining against it, and another time we thought we heard a

whirring or flapping sound not far off. On each occasion investigation revealed nothing, and we began to ascribe the occurrences to imagination alone—that same curiously disturbed imagination which still prolonged in our ears the faint far baying we thought we had heard in the Holland churchyard. The jade amulet now reposed in a niche in our museum, and sometimes we burned strangely scented candles before it. We read much in Alhazred's *Necronomicon* about its properties and about the relation of ghosts' souls to the objects it symbolized; and were disturbed by what we read.

Then terror came.

On the night of September 24, 19—, I heard a knock at my chamber door. Fancying it St. John's, I bade the knocker enter, but was answered only by a shrill laugh. There was no one in the corridor. When I aroused St. John from his sleep, he professed entire ignorance of the event, and became as worried as I. It was that night that the faint distant baying over the moor became to us a certain and dreaded reality.

Four days later, whilst we were both in the hidden museum, there came a low, cautious, scratching at the single door which led to the secret library staircase. Our alarm was now divided, for besides our fear of the unknown, we had always entertained a dread that our grisly collection might be discovered. Extinguishing all lights, we proceeded to the door and threw it suddenly open; whereupon we felt an unaccountable rush of air, and heard, as if receding far away, a queer combination of rustling, tittering, and articulate chatter. Whether we were mad, dreaming, or in our senses we did not try to determine. We only realized, with the blackest of apprehensions, that the apparently disembodied chatter was beyond a doubt *in the Dutch language.*

After that we lived in growing horror and fascination. Mostly we held to the theory that we were jointly going mad from our life of unnatural excitements, but sometimes it pleased us more to dramatize ourselves as the victims of some creeping and appalling doom. Bizarre manifestations were now too frequent to count. Our lonely house was seemingly alive with the presence of some malign being whose nature we could not guess, and every night that demoniac baying rolled over the wind-swept moor, always louder and louder. On October 29 we found in the soft earth underneath the library window a series of footprints utterly impossible to describe. They were as baffling as the hordes of great bats which haunted the old manor-house in unprecedented and increasing numbers.

The horror reached a culmination on November 18, when St. John, walking home after dark from the dismal railway station, was seized by some frightful carnivorous thing and torn to ribbons. His screams had reached the house, and I had hastened to the terrible scene in time to hear a whir of wings and see a vague black cloudy thing silhouetted against the rising moon.

My friend was dying when I spoke to him, and he could not answer coherently. All he could do was whisper, "The amulet—that damned thing——"

Then he collapsed, an inert mass of mangled flesh.

I BURIED him the next midnight in one of our neglected gardens, and mumbled over his body one of the devilish rituals he had loved in life. And as I pronounced the last demoniac sentence I heard afar on the moor the faint baying of some gigantic hound. The moon was up, but I dared not look at it. And when I saw on the dim-lighted moor a wide nebulous shadow sweeping from mound to mound, I shut my eyes and

threw myself face down upon the ground. When I arose, trembling, I know not how much later, I staggered into the house and made shocking obeisances before the enshrined amulet of green jade.

Being now afraid to live alone in the ancient house on the moor, I departed on the following day for London, taking with me the amulet after destroying by fire and burial the rest of the impious collection in the museum. But after three nights I heard the baying again, and before a week was over felt strange eyes upon me whenever it was dark. One evening as I strolled on Victoria Embankment for some needed air, I saw a black shape obscure one of the reflections of the lamps in the water. A wind, stronger than the night-wind, rushed by, and I knew that what had befallen St. John must soon befall me.

The next day I carefully wrapped the green jade amulet and sailed for Holland. What mercy I might gain by returning the thing to its silent, sleeping owner I knew not; buf I felt that I must at least try any step conceivably logical. What the hound was, and why it had pursued me, were questions still vague; but I had first heard the baying in that ancient churchyard, and every subsequent event including St. John's dying whisper had served to connect the curse with the stealing of the amulet. Accordingly I sank into the nethermost abysses of despair when, at an inn in Rotterdam, I discovered that thieves had despoiled me of this sole means of salvation.

The baying was loud that evening, and in the morning I read of a nameless deed in the vilest quarter of the city. The rabble were in terror, for upon an evil tenement had fallen a red death beyond the foulest previous crime of the neighborhood. In a squalid thieves' den an entire family had been torn to shreds by an unknown thing which left no trace, and those around had heard all night above the usual clamor of drunken voices a faint, deep, insistent note as of a gigantic hound.

So at last I stood again in the unwholesome churchyard where a pale winter moon cast its hideous shadows, and leafless trees drooped sullenly to meet the withered, frosty grass and crackling slabs, and the ivied church pointed a jeering finger at the unfriendly sky, and the night-wind howled maniacally from over frozen swamps and frigid seas. The baying was very faint now, and it ceased altogether as I approached the ancient grave I had once violated, and frightened away an abnormally large horde of bats which had been hovering curiously around it.

I know not why I went thither unless to pray, or gibber out insane pleas and apologies to the calm white thing that lay within; but, whatever my reason, I attacked the half-frozen sod with a desperation partly mine and partly that of a dominating will outside myself. Excavation was much easier than I expected, though at one point I encountered a queer interruption; when a lean vulture darted down out of the cold sky and pecked frantically at the grave-earth until I killed him with a blow of my spade. Finally I reached the rotting oblong box and removed the damp nitrous cover. This is the last rational act I ever performed.

For crouched within that centuried coffin, embraced by a close-packed nightmare retinue of huge, sinewy, sleeping bats, was the bony thing my friend and I had robbed; not clean and placid as we had seen it then, but covered with caked blood and shreds of alien flesh and hair, and leering sentiently at me with phosphorescent sockets and sharp ensanguined fangs yawning twistedly in mockery of my inevitable doom. And when it gave from those grinning jaws a deep,

(Continued on page 432)

The Eyrie

(Continued from page 294)

Attracted by its cover I purchased it—blessed be the day! My favorite author is Seabury Quinn. His Jules de Grandin stories are wonderful. Is there any chance of his putting them into book form? His *House of Golden Masks* is the best combination of horror and torture I have read. De Grandin's quaint sayings and actions relieve tension. How about a bigger and better Eyrie?"

"Give us more revenge and reincarnation stories, as they are my favorites," writes Mrs. J. F. Lovejoy, of Oklahoma City, and adds: "I have only missed one copy of your magazine since the first issue, and that was when I was ill with pneumonia."

"Half of your stories are great and they live up to their name," writes John Harris, of Newark, New Jersey, "but some of those ghost stories where the hero uses a silver bullet to send some spirit or ghost back to the place it came from are really nothing to rave about. Why can't the authors use the same means of destroying said spirit as they had of creating him? How about more interplanetary stories, or things that the mind really can conceive?"

Writes Dick Thomas, of Shamokin, Pennsylvania: "I am a devoted reader of your magazine, and wish it a lot of success. I like interplanetary stories, and would like to see more of them. Please put more than one Seabury Quinn story in each issue, if possible."

Reader, what is your favorite story in this issue of WEIRD TALES? *The Corpse-Master,* by Seabury Quinn, easily led the field in the July issue in popularity with the readers, as shown by the letters to the Eyrie.

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Story	Remarks
(1)_____	_____
(2)_____	_____
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Trespassing Souls

(Continued from page 333)

which stood in the corner," I persisted. "What was it? I couldn't see it clearly; indeed, the more closely I looked at it, the vaguer it seemed, but when I looked away I thought I descried a tall, terrible old man with flashing red eyes and a naked sword between his hands. Was it——"

"Pontou the wicked one, who by his necromantic sorcery more than once escaped the bounds of death, had long cheated Azra'il, the Death Angel," he replied. "The ancient lore is full of stories of the psychopompos, or spirit-leader, who takes the severed soul from the new-dead body and conducts it through the frontiers of the spirit world. Perhaps it was none other than Death's own angel who stood among the shadows and waited patiently for the spirits which long had cheated him, my friend. I myself do remember the whispered gossip which went the rounds of St. Petersburg some twenty years and more ago. I was studying in the Imperial Hospital at the time, and servants of the Winter Palace whispered a strange story of a little duchess who accidentally ate some oysters intended for the Tsar, and fell fainting to the floor, and how her little cousin awoke screaming in the night to say a tall, bearded figure had come into their room, then trodden silently into the poisoned child's apartments. Next instant, while still the frightened children's screams rang out, the poisoned little one gave up her soul. I do not know, but——"

"But that's absurd," I cut in. "All this talk of death angels is a lot of old wives' balderdash, de Grandin, you know as well as I. What we call death is nothing but a physiological fact—the breaking-down of the human mechanism for one reason or another. As to the spiritual phases of it, of course, I'm not prepared to say, but——"

"Of course not," he agreed. "We know so little of the spirit world that he who would expound it stamps himself a fool thereby.

"But this I say without fear of denial, my friend, there is one sort of spirit who is no mystery, and with him I would hold immediate communion. In the lower left-hand drawer of your office desk reposes a bottle of Three-Star cognac, distilled in *la belle France* long years before Monsieur Volstead's blighting legislation was thought of. This moment it is full. *Parbleu,* if I do not decrease its contents by half before I am an hour older may every fiend of lowest hell fly off with me!"

The White Wizard

Continued from page 314)

have left the tower had he wished, but the strange events of the past hour stirred in him a desire to see what might happen next.

3

Without noticing Phil, Mendoza turned from the window after his frenzied weeping was spent and went to his desk. From a locked drawer he took two small, exquisitely painted miniatures. His hand trembled as he fingered them. Phil could plainly see the faces from where he sat. One was Mendoza's own portrait, painted in the first flush of manhood. The beardless face and frank, happy eyes were alive with the vivid impulses of a youth full of fire and intelligence. The other portrait was that of a beautiful girl.

Mendoza looked from one picture to the other, his pallid lips drawn in a thin, pained line. He put them down suddenly, as though he could not bear looking at them. For several minutes he sat with his head bent in thought.

A sudden resolve seemed to possess him, for he reached for a diary and began writing in it. Phil felt awkward, as though he were viewing a scene too private for a witness.

All traces of the recent evil passions had left Mendoza's white face; again he was the proud aristocrat. At intervals he stopped writing and gazed with evident horror upon the blood-spattered body of the ape.

When he had finished writing, he left the diary lying open, and once more picked up the woman's portrait. He whispered soft Spanish words over it, crushed it roughly to his lips.

Still holding the miniature, he went over to the curtain in the corner of the room and threw it aside. A tiny machine of delicate workmanship was disclosed. In a network of fine wires

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revolved a small glass bulb, filled with a liquid that constantly quivered and sent out tiny shafts of white light.

Mendoza passed his hand with a gentle, loving touch over the bulb. Suddenly his fingers closed over it sharply, until the delicate glass cracked into fragments. The heavy, trembling liquid ran over his hand, eating into the flesh like acid. Mendoza surveyed the ruin he had wrought and laughed shortly.

"The inglorious end of the White Wizard's genius," he said.

Phil uttered a cry of protest, but Mendoza refused to acknowledge his presence. His right hand still clasped the broken fragments of glass. The shimmering liquid had eaten holes and ruts in the flesh; some of it still boiled and trembled in the livid depressions. But Mendoza gave no symptoms of pain, or even discomfort. He walked leisurely toward his desk and fumbled about one of the drawers.

A sudden, sharp report resounded in the room. Mendoza fell in a heap to the floor.

Instantly Phil was beside him. A tiny stream of blood flowed from the massive forehead, and the revolver still smoked in the mutilated right hand. He never moved after he fell.

When Phil had recovered from the horror of it, his first thought was the dead man's diary. Mendoza's last actions were all clear to him now.

Trembling with excitement and dread of the possible revelations, he went to the desk and read the last insertion in the diary:

I, Julian Mendoza, am about to end my life, realizing at this moment that it has been wasted in perfecting a discovery which would prove a curse to the human race; and before I take the step that will destroy me, I earnestly desire to make my confession to the world, and to ask forgiveness of those whom I have injured.

After years of study and labor I have perfected an instrument that makes possible the practicable use of thought-radio—that marvelous force of which science knows but little.

I have robbed the graves of great thinkers directly after they were buried, to obtain their brains. I have robbed museums, laboratories, hospitals, to obtain the preserved brains of many notables who have died in the past.

And I have made the education, talents, and life experiences recorded in these brains my own.

I have pillaged the minds not only of superior human beings, but also of criminals and animals. I have had connection with the brain of a man-eating tiger that was killed in a Burmese hut; with a head-hunter of Patagonia; with a murderer who was hanged. My nature has some of the most fiendish passions of the fiercest beasts; of the vile, crawling things of the earth; and of men who have sinned grossly.

If I should go into the world with my mighty brain and my mysterious power, I could make it either a heaven or a hell. But I am a dual character that is a menace to civilization.

By the time this is read, the garden in the hill will be no more; for, with a shift of a lever, I have cut off the atmosphere which I created, and immediately everything in the garden passed into complete dissolution. Search and you will find a cave of dust.

When Phil finished reading, there was a mist in his eyes. He went to the dead body of the White Wizard and reverently arranged the limbs. A soft smile parted the pallid lips, giving the still face a singular expression of peace.

"He was not all brute," said Phil gently.

He covered the face with a clean handkerchief, and went to find Tom.

10

PHIL and Inez lolled back in their steamer chairs, watching the late afternoon sun flashing on the blue waves of the Atlantic. Inez was entrancing in a white serge suit. The fresh air had whipped a lovely wild-rose color to her creamy cheeks. Her light curls blew against a saucy red cap.

"It is like a dream, Phil, isn't it?" she said.

"Yes; she's a peach of a dream," replied her enraptured husband, gazing at her beautiful face.

"Stop joking when I try to be serious," she pouted. "I mean those last terrible days. Shall we ever know how much that we saw was really true and how much was due to hallucination, hypnotism, or maybe to some mysterious jungle delirium?"

The boyish smile faded from Phil's face, and he answered in a low voice:

"We doubted everything when we found that under the trap-door in the tower there lay only an empty, dusty cave, just what the diary said we'd find. But let me show you something that is almost beyond belief."

He fumbled in his pocket and drew out a notebook and a pencil. For a moment, he glanced over the ocean with a dreamy look in his eyes. Then he began writing fast and fluently. When he finished, he showed her the page covered with queer pictures and characters.

"Hieroglyphics," he said, in answer to her puzzled frown. "Ever since that night in Don Julian's laboratory, I have been able to write in the way of the ancient Egyptians. I interviewed the famous Professor Costello of Buenos Aires before we sailed, and he showed me some photographs that he had taken of hieroglyphics, inscribed upon the walls of a tomb, which had never been deciphered. I glanced at the photographs, and the memories of Psamaeris the Egyptian began to quicken in my brain. And, Inez, I translated those heiroglyphics as readily as though they were a schoolboy's exercise in Latin!"

Tom came up in time to hear the last part of his speech.

"I ought to be envious of you, Phil," he said. "You not only won the prettiest girl on two continents, but all the adventure fell to you. I believe that I'll turn into a rattle-headed dreamer, too. They seem to get more kick out of life than we sober-minded realists."

"I told you so," grinned Phil, tightening his clasp upon Inez's hand.

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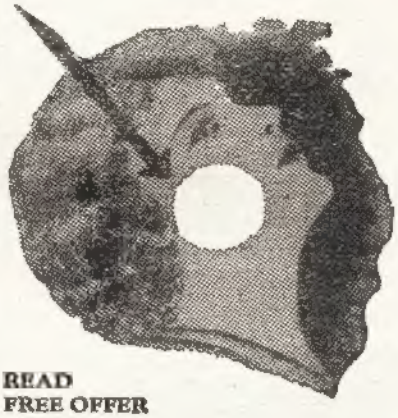

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The Hound

(Continued from page 425)

sardonic bay as of some gigantic hound, and I saw that it held in its gory, filthy claw the lost and fateful amulet of green jade, I merely screamed and ran away idiotically, my screams soon dissolving into peals of hysterical laughter.

Madness rides the star-wind . . . claws and teeth sharpened on centuries of corpses . . . dripping death astride a bacchanale of bats from night-black ruins of buried temples of Belial. . . . Now, as the baying of that dead, fleshless monstrosity grows louder and louder, and the stealthy whirring and flapping of those accursed web-wings circles closer and closer, I shall seek with my revolver the oblivion which is my only refuge from the unnamed and unnamable.

The Moor Ghost

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

They haled him to the crossroads
  As day was at its close;
They hung him to the gallows
  And left him for the crows.

His hands in life were bloody,
  His ghost will not be still;
He haunts the naked moorlands
  About the gibbet hill.

And oft a lonely traveler
  Is found upon the fen
Whose dead eyes hold a horror
  Beyond the world of men.

The villagers then whisper,
  With accents grim and dour:
"This man has met at midnight
  The phantom of the moor."

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To be popular—always in demand at parties, and affairs and social gatherings one must be a good mixer and possess a pleasant personality. Why should you sit at home, feeling blue and out of sorts—no place to go—nobody to see? Stop being bashful and embarrassed when you meet people for the first time or when you are in the company of the opposite sex.

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